# SHAPING CHICAGO:

# HOW OWNERSHIP AND TRUST INFLUENCE ENGAGEMENT IN BUILDING THE CITY

A thesis presented by

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**Dedicated to my God and my people:**

*"But seek the welfare of the city*

*where I have sent you into exile,*

*and pray to the Lord on its behalf,*

*for in its welfare, you will find your welfare."*

—Jeremiah 29:7

**Together, we will make this place a home.**

**ABSTRACT**

"Shaping Chicago" explores the dynamics of ownership and trust among Chicago residents and their impact on community engagement in shaping the physical aspects of their neighborhoods. Utilizing a mixed-methods approach including interviews of residents, planners, and community organizers, city-wide quantitative data analysis, ethnographic observations, and content analysis of We Will Chicago project meetings, the study spans across all of Chicago's diverse communities, focusing on present-day interpersonal experiences residents and planners have while also considering potential impacts from historical divestment in particular regions. This study reveals that residents' sense of ownership is less influenced by monetary investment, and more significantly shaped by temporal investment, social cohesion, and change making abilities. DIY actions, or actions without permission, can sometimes arise as an expression of ownership and community action. Trust was found to be low across the city but is notably worse in areas of greater hardship. This mistrust stemmed from a combination of historical wrongdoing and negative personal experiences with the city. Between planners and residents, trust was established as important to collaboration, but the two-way nature of that trust was not fully understood, with some confusion from planners on the necessity of trusting residents. Furthermore, city initiatives aimed at improving the relationship between residents and the city often fall short and have the inverse effect, perpetuating mistrust among residents. These findings hold key insights for the future of urban planning, particularly increasing residents' engagement within community-based design efforts. It also contributes to our understanding of resident-city dynamics for future studies in urban sociology.

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My final thank you is dedicated to my God, who has been faithful at every stage and carried my heart and mind throughout the past four years and my entire life. At the core of this work is the desire to help others, which He has given me, and as the Psalmist proclaims:

*"Unless the Lord builds the house,*
*those who build it labor in vain.*
*Unless the Lord watches over the city,*
*the watchman stays awake in vain.*

*It is in vain that you rise up early*
*and go late to rest,*
*eating the bread of anxious toil;*
*for he gives to his beloved sleep"*
(Psalm 127:1-2).

I would be lying if I said that I didn't participate in some of that vain early rising and going late to rest during this process (much more of the latter in these past few months), but I am quite certain any sleep I did receive was only out of His love. It is only by His goodness—felt often through the love and support of those around me—that this work has finally come to completion.

I pray that it would be pleasing and acceptable to You, My Lord and My God.

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# INTRODUCTION

Cities are our future. According to the United Nations (UN), "55% of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 68% by 2050." That's about an additional 2.5 billion people worldwide (United Nations 2018). In the United States cities should also be a major point of interest, with 82% of people already living in urban areas as of 2018, and an expected increase to 89% by 2050 (ibid). If cities are our future, it follows that we should invest the time and resources necessary into preparing them to be effective and enjoyable places to live. So far, we haven't been doing as well as we could.

Well-planned cities and green spaces within them are necessary for the physical and mental health of residents (Lee, Jordan, and Horsley 2015). The UN reports as of 2023, however, that 75% of cities only have 20% or less of their area dedicated to public spaces and streets, while the goal sits at 45-50%. Additionally, in urban areas 1.1 billion people live in slums with estimates that over the next 30 years about 2 billion more will be added to that number (United Nations 2023). In the US specifically, cities face challenges reflective of global issues. Many people struggle to access affordable housing, particularly in recent years (Ludden 2023). For those living in cities without enough green space, rising temperatures lead to heat related health complications (Salcedo 2023). U.S. infrastructure, much of which was built decades ago, is struggling to keep up with the ever-growing economy and its associated strain (McBride, Berman, and Siripurapu 2023). Something has to change.

One of the goals that the UN has proposed to work toward addressing the challenges facing cities is to "enhance inclusive and sustainable urbanization and capacity for participatory, integrated and sustainable human settlement planning and management in all countries" (United Nations 2023). The concept of participatory urban development, or involving the community in

urban planning efforts, has been gaining traction in US cities. It requires involvement from both residents (to participate) and urban planners (to facilitate this participation) and can feature initiatives such as participatory budgeting and public forums—meetings where residents can come and offer feedback on changes city leaders and urban planners have proposed. While these initiatives reflect a shift toward more inclusive and democratic urban governance aligning with the UN's goals for sustainable urbanization, they are not enough. Even if we are able to create effective modes for people to participate in creating better cities, two key challenges stand in the way of these opportunities being utilized by the residents we need to hear from. First, there is the question of whether residents will feel the need to participate in this shaping of their environment—whether they feel a sense of "ownership" over their neighborhoods. Second, there is the question of whether residents will feel that their participation is worthwhile—whether they feel a sense of "trust" in the city. To be able to design inroads for participation that can account for these challenges, we must better define how current residents and urban planners understand these concepts and how they influence current engagement. The aim of this thesis is to explore the perceptions of these ideas and their manifestations, looking closely at the city of Chicago as a useful case study due to its long history as a planned city, clear ward and community area divisions, as well as its recent city-wide planning initiative.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In this study of community-engagement in Chicago, I ask three core research questions:

> **RQ1:** How do demographic characteristics, socio-economic conditions, and geographic boundaries influence patterns of trust and ownership across the city?

**RQ2:** How do residents and urban planners understand their sense of ownership over their communities, and how does their engagement in shaping the physical aspects of their neighborhood vary as a result?

**RQ3:** How do residents and urban planners form and establish a sense of trust between one another, and how does this trust or lack thereof influence their participation in shaping the physical aspects of their neighborhood?

## WHY CHICAGO

There are several qualities that make Chicago an excellent city to study elements related to the engagement of residents in shaping their communities, one of the foremost being its extensive history with urban planning. Additionally, considerations of the city's divides further structure it as a fitting environment to study ownership and trust.

### *Historical Setting*

The first reason Chicago is an interesting place to study these questions is its unique story of growth and history in relation to urban planning. In the early 1800s, Chicago was a very small city on Lake Michigan, and the country didn't expect she would amount to anything extraordinary like New York or Philadelphia; however, by the end of the 1800s it was the second largest American city in terms of population and considered one of the top five cities in the world (Philpott 1978). This fast growth was not without consequence, and overcrowding in poor areas of the city caused a massive fire in 1871, where it's estimated around one third of people lost their homes and thousands more lost significant portions of money. Some of these monetary losses impacted the upper class, who after the fire started to pay attention to the overcrowded

slums of their city, but it wasn't enough to make them care about drastically improving the quality of life there (ibid). Instead, their attention, as well as that of the media, was on the *real* Chicago—that is, the areas occupied by the wealthy and upper class. Reporters rarely wrote about the neighborhoods of the working class, unless it was to report on a crime (ibid). This interaction between the haves and the have-nots is necessary to understanding the important connection between the city of Chicago and the history of planning. Almost as fast as Chicago's growth was the speed with which wealthy residents realized planning the future of their city would be necessary to support its expansion (McCabe 2016). The 1871 fire gave Chicago an opportunity, unlike other U.S. cities at that time, to implement visionary planning ideas such as the gridded streets and the Chicago River's development; however, those ideas rarely took into consideration, let alone focused on, the experiences or needs of Chicago's poor, Black, and immigrant populations.

A perfect example of this issue is present in the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893. The Exposition was designed to celebrate the anniversary of Columbus's voyage to the Americas and to showcase American excellence in power and innovation. Overseen by Daniel Burnham, this fair is credited as being a critical point in the development of the vision for what American cities should be and the City Beautiful movement, a concept that the design of cities and social issues could not be separated (McBrien 2022; Blumberg and Yalzadeh 2019). In theory, this could be interpreted as a net positive. More and more contemporary research continues to affirm the important impact that city environments have on residents' physical health, social well-being, and overall quality of life (Sampson, Morenoff, and Ganon-Rowley 2002; Leyden 2003; Srinivasan, O'Fallon, and Dearry 2003), but at that point in history the City Beautiful movement mostly benefited those who fit within the vision of the "White city" as Burnham's famous

world's fair grounds came to be called (McBrien 2022). This nickname had more to do with the white Neoclassical architecture that dominated the grounds than race, but unintentionally and unfortunately also reflects the deeper priorities of those who had power to shape cities around the world, and especially in Chicago.

As Progressive-era reformers arose and began to take interest in city slums in the early 1900s, the question of whether people shaped their environments, or their environments shaped them began to be debated (McCabe 2016). While this question of whether it was nature or nurture dominating the slums wasn't yet settled, most reformers were united in their belief and fear that the slums were a net negative to, not only those who lived within them, but to the entire city and collective society (ibid). They needed to be able to institute plans that dictated what happened in their city and where, but at the turn of the 20th century they didn't have the power to declare zoning regulations, which meant that they needed the public's buy-in (Schlereth 1983). After the city's elites commissioned Daniel Burnham to create the 1909 Plan of Chicago, they turned to Walter Dwight Moody to create a large-scale promotional campaign aimed at convincing voters—particularly those who were "property owners or tenants who paid more than $25 or more per month in rent" --- to support the plan, about 165,000 Chicago residents in total (ibid: 72). However, since most minority residents weren't property owners and lived in low-income housing (McCabe 2016), it's reasonable to expect that they were not targeted in this campaign to get the city on board with these plans.

As time progressed, Chicago continued to march forward with its plans for growth, often at the expense of the marginalized. Highways were built that divided neighborhoods and forced

evictions in the name of "urban renewal" (Metropolitan Planning Council 2020). Redlining[1], housing covenants[2], and blockbusting[3]—a nationwide practice believed to have been started in Chicago (City of Chicago 2022)—maintained and exacerbated the color lines of an already segregated city, particularly on the South and West sides of Chicago (Bennett, Hartley, and Rose 2022). Today, in spite of Chicago being ranked as one of the most diverse cities in America, it is also the most segregated (Dodge 2015). Low-income and Black communities remain concentrated in the South and West sides of the city, where lack of investment has resulted in city-owned vacant lots sitting unused and overgrown, cutting up neighborhoods, and industrial-based pollution contributing to huge neighborhood-based health disparities and huge gaps in life expectancy between races (City of Chicago 2022).

The good news is that this is not where the story of Chicago and planning ends. In recent years, there has been more interest from city leaders in making up for the harms of the past by intentionally including considerations of diversity and equity in planning (Kwon and Nguyen 2023; Krumholz and Hexter 2022; Krumholz and Forester 2011). If urban planning hopes to be able to plan cities effectively for *all* people, it will require re-examining the roles that trust and ownership have come to play in determining the participation of residents in these processes, as well as the role these elements have come to play in how planners interpret and implement that engagement into their final designs. My research seeks to contribute to this area by studying the

[1] Redlining is discrimination based on race or ethnicity that denies or limits access to financial services such as banking, insurance, or access to loans for homes in certain areas. It is traditionally associated with discrimination within the U.S. housing markets in the mid-20th century.

[2] Housing covenants were agreements embedded in property deeds that restricted the sale or occupancy of a property to individuals of certain races, religions, or other characteristics. They were declared unenforceable by the Supreme Court in 1948, but were major contributors to segregation.

[3] Blockbusting was a discriminatory practice where real estate agents would induce homeowners to sell their properties at low prices to quickly move out of neighborhoods where they were told racial minorities were moving in and would decrease their property values. The properties could then be sold at inflated prices to minorities (whose presence would legitimize the original lies and perpetuate the cycle).

experiences of planners and residents who have taken part in these processes in recent years, and Chicago's history with urban planning, in both its early opportunities for innovation and its infliction of hardship upon the poor and minority races, makes it a fascinating place to begin this investigation.

*Neighborhood Structure*

Along with its historical background, the city of Chicago also has clearly defined ward and community area boundaries that make it an interesting place to study ownership and trust. In addition to people identifying themselves as residents of Chicago, they may also identify themselves as belonging to a particular neighborhood, community area, or ward.

While neighborhoods are less easily defined by smaller groupings, they typically fall within a community area or ward boundary, two units of community measurement that I will use throughout this thesis. Community areas are slices of the city originally mapped out by UChicago sociologists Robert E. Park and Ernest Burgess in the late 1920s (Chicago Studies 2020). These 77 groups, barring the additions of O'Hare and Edgewater in 1956 and 1980 respectively, have had consistent boundaries since their inception (ibid). Because these boundaries are relatively static, they can be used as a means of measuring how different factors change over time, such as the Hardship Index, vacancy, trust in the local government, etc. The other unit for communities within the cities are wards. Chicago has 50 wards that encompass the city, and whose boundaries are decided politically by a vote of city council members. Each ward is represented by an alderman who is elected by the people of the ward and is meant to represent the interests of their ward within the city council, a body composed entirely of the aldermen and the mayor (who is a non-voting member of this body) (Office of the City Clerk, 2024). While

these boundaries can change regularly (the last change was approved by Chicago city council on May 16th, 2022, during the time of this study) they are the unit of community through which political power and decision making is exercised.

These two modes of community structure—community areas and wards—make it interesting to study Chicago for its overlap of obvious divisions between divides of political power versus divides of social cohesion in the context of sense of ownership and trust. If the divides in social cohesion do not align with the divides of political power, it could lead to challenges in working together to make changes.

## OWNERSHIP, TRUST, AND SOCIAL EFFICACY

Ownership and trust overlap in many ways within urban planning practices, with one able to influence the other and vice versa. I look to these concepts as the key contributors to behavior regarding the formation of the physical city space. Before we examine their relation, however, it is necessary to define them separately.

Within the context of the city, I focus on the trust between neighbors and the trust between residents and the city. The trust between neighbors seems to be a form of privilege shaped by differences in lived experience rather than differences in perception (Putnam 2000). It is also less prevalent among younger populations, with each generation self-reporting less trustworthy than the preceding ones (ibid). Between residents and the government, trust can also be a challenge among racial or ethnic minorities, making it more difficult for planners to solicit feedback (Patrick et al 2017). Where lack of trust in the government exists, but "high political efficacy" also exists, it may encourage participation from those who want to be "watchdogs," however (Laurian 2009).

This increased desire to act in the neighborhood is a part of what I term ownership, which can be felt by residents in the process, the outcome, or the distribution of community development (Lachapelle 2008). Similar to trust, this can also fluctuate with privilege, as studies show that homeowners are more responsive to the local policies, whether because of their interest in how local action could impact their property values or the stability of their location (McCabe 2013). Beyond just financial ties, ownership can only come about if residents are allowed some degree of control, which requires trust, once again connecting the two concepts (Lachapelle 2008).

Social cohesion and collective efficacy are also important factors that manifest from trust and ownership, with social cohesion requiring trust to be forged and collective efficacy requiring ownership to be acted upon. Each generation seems to spend less time in community life, possibly associated with lower rates of trust. There is traditionally a strong correlation between social trust and reciprocity with levels of civic engagement (Putnam 2000). In his book "Great American City: Chicago and The Enduring Neighborhood Effect," Robert J. Sampson discusses the concept of collective efficacy, which requires (limited) trust and the desire for control, which could be understood as a desire for a degree of ownership (2012). The amount of social trust needed varies depending on the strength of organizations present in the neighborhood, which can pose challenges for groups that lack monetary or social resources (ibid).

To look at community connection through a more classical lens, we can think about neighborhoods within Chicago as another form of social organization or solidarity. While Tonnies and Durkheim (1972) might not expect to apply the concepts in such a manner, we can think of neighborhoods as small "communities" within the larger city—the "society." Community areas in Chicago are infused with the identity and nearness that Richard Sennet

(1977) described could still form a community bond within the city. Robert E. Park (1915) asserts that living nearby and friendly relationships are crucial to organizing within the city because people who live together tend to have similar interests and investments when it comes to city policies. Jane Jacobs (1961) clarifies three kinds of neighborhoods: (1) the city as a whole, (2) the street neighborhoods, and (3) the districts. In Chicago, this applies to (1) Chicago, (2) the community areas, and (3) the wards.

Overall, ownership and trust are central to urban planning. They influence one another and can be further influenced by privilege, political efficacy, and social cohesion. By shaping the relationships that form the basis for potential engagement, trust and ownership shape the city itself, making them critical to understand as we embark on a quest to improve the future of our cities.

## METHODS

This study adopts a mixed-methods approach to delve into how sense of ownership and trust influence community engagement in urban development in Chicago.

### *Qualitative Research Methods*

At the heart of the qualitative analysis are in-depth interviews with 29 residents of Chicago (7 of which also worked as planners), conducted between May and August 2023. These semi-structured interviews were designed to capture a broad spectrum of experiences, feelings, and perceptions related to urban development and community involvement. The interviews explored participants' sense of ownership over their neighborhoods, trust in local government and urban planners, and their involvement in various community-shaping activities. The study

utilized thematic analysis to inductively identify and interpret key themes from these interviews, additionally enhanced by ethnographic observations and participant observations. Ethnographic observation involved living in Chicago's North side and working at a design firm to gain firsthand insight into urban planning processes and community engagement. I also engaged in participant observation by attending community meetings and recording details about the dynamics of resident involvement to further enrich my qualitative data.

*Quantitative Research Methods*

Complementing the qualitative insights, the study incorporated quantitative analysis of city-wide datasets to examine broader patterns across Chicago. This analysis focused on descriptive and inferential statistics to understand the distribution and correlation of variables like owner occupation rates, neighborhood cleanliness, and trust in local government. Employing correlation analysis, this research offers a statistical perspective on the relationships between key urban development variables. The combination of data types and analytical techniques strengthens the study's findings, providing a multifaceted view of the factors that influence urban community engagement.

By integrating these qualitative and quantitative methods, the study achieves a comprehensive understanding of the interplay between ownership, trust, and community involvement in shaping the urban fabric of Chicago.

## OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

In Chapter 1, I delve into the demographic, socio-economic, and geographic influences on trust and ownership across the city, categorizing the city into North, West, and South sectors

for a focused analysis. The study highlights a clear disparity in hardship, with Black and Hispanic communities experiencing higher levels of hardship compared to predominantly white neighborhoods. Additionally, I explore age as a demographic factor, finding a slight but not significant correlation with trust in local government, suggesting nuanced influences beyond mere age. The investigation also covers internal community area divisions, such as wards and racial makeup, to assess their impact on trust and neighborhood cleanliness. Contrary to expectations, no significant correlation is found between the number of ward divisions or racial hegemony within community areas and levels of trust in local government or perceptions of cleanliness. This chapter establishes a critical understanding of the complex interplay between demographic factors, socio-economic conditions, geographic boundaries and residents' engagement in urban development in Chicago.

In Chapter 2, I explore how perceived ownership influences residents' engagement with their communities in Chicago. Ownership is articulated through investment, social cohesion, and the ability to enact change. Planners, with significant change-making power, often avoid claiming "ownership" over their projects, preferring terms that reflect a different relationship with their work environments, such as responsibility or facilitation. The concept of ownership bifurcates into individual and communal forms, with the former involving personal property improvements and the latter encompassing care for shared spaces.

The distinction between renters and owners introduces complexity, challenging the notion that financial investment equates to ownership. Instead, residents highlight temporal investment and the difficulties of engaging those in multifamily dwellings as more significant. This challenges the stigma that renters contribute less to community shaping. Vacant land management illustrates the impact of ownership perceptions; visible neglect diminishes feelings of community

ownership. Programs like the Large Lots Program and ChiBlockBuilder aim to foster ownership but can inadvertently highlight feelings of powerlessness or lack of initiative among residents. I'll describe these initiatives in further detail in the Context chapter. Some residents thus resort to unauthorized change-making to assert ownership. Attitudes towards graffiti vary, with some seeing it as a sign of inadequate ownership, particularly on private property, while others view it as a positive contribution to underutilized communal spaces. However, graffiti on collectively owned property is generally unwelcome, seen as an over assertion of individual ownership. This chapter demonstrates the multifaceted relationship between ownership perceptions and community engagement in urban development.

In Chapter 3, I delve into the complex relationship between trust and resident engagement in urban spaces in Chicago, revealing that trust is markedly low, especially in areas facing higher hardship levels. Historical disenfranchisement and perceived neglect by city officials have entrenched skepticism towards the city's intentions, undermining even positive initiatives. This skepticism extends to planners, who, while aware of the trust deficit, often overlook the importance of reciprocating trust in residents, revealing a critical gap in urban planning efforts. The chapter underscores the universal call for transparency, genuine communication, and honesty about constraints as foundational to rebuilding trust. Residents and planners diverge only slightly in their strategies for trust-building; residents prioritize transparency, while planners focus on relatability and demonstrating tangible outcomes. Furthermore, the power of strong neighborhood social networks is highlighted as a catalyst for collective action and potentially a counterbalance to negative perceptions of local government, suggesting that community cohesion can enhance trust in local governance. The exploration of trust dynamics within Chicago's initiatives, particularly We Will Chicago, illustrates the delicate balance between

efforts to enhance community engagement and the ease with which such efforts can inadvertently fuel mistrust. Poor experiences with community meetings and a belief among some residents in their lack of expertise underscore the challenges in fostering meaningful participation. Despite intentions to improve trust through We Will Chicago, miscommunications, and unfulfilled promises, especially in historically neglected South and West sides, exacerbate mistrust. The enduring presence of vacant lots, perceived as symbols of the city's indifference, further cements this distrust, underscoring the need for more effective, transparent, and inclusive urban planning practices. Taken together, these findings reflect the importance of resident buy-in on the effectiveness of engagement efforts, both with regard to their trust in the local government and their sense of ownership in their communities. Understanding the obstacles that stand in the way of cultivating this buy-in are necessary to creating effective initiatives that put our cities back on track to being places of community well-being.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

Trust and ownership both play important and complementary roles influencing the behaviors of residents and planners as they engage in shaping the city. Trust influences how residents perceive and interact with planners and government institutions, impacting their willingness to participate in the development and governance of their neighborhoods. Ownership, which spans a broad sense of control and responsibility, affects the methods individuals employ to engage with their urban environment. Both of these are needed for action to be taken within cities, manifesting in social organization and collective efficacy. This review delves into both classical works and contemporary research in sociology to discuss how ownership and trust are defined and interact with one another, leading to community action. First, it will analyze a model of trust formation, explaining how trust is formed within a neighborhood and then between residents and planners. Next, it will examine the definition of ownership over both private and communal property, exploring how planners and residents see their role regarding ownership in community processes. Finally, it will dissect social organization and how engagement in community groups can lead to effective change within neighborhoods.

## TRUST

### *Defining Trust*

One of the most important components of shaping the city is trust. Looking across disciplines, Rousseau (1998) finds that scholars generally agree that trust should be understood as important for life within organizations. Within the field of sociology, it's understood as the result of institutional arrangements. In relationships that span over long periods of time, trust is

not merely a present or absent binary, but a condition that can permeate some areas of a relationship while falling short in others (ibid). For example, I might trust that my neighbor will help me with cooking, but not trust them to watch my house for me when I'm gone. Rousseau points out four kinds of trust:

1. Deterrence-based trust - exists when the costs of breaking the trust are too high to pose a feasible threat.
2. Calculus-based trust - based on reliable insights into another's capabilities.
3. Relational trust - comes from consistent interactions in which trustworthiness foster hopeful anticipations of the same repeating in the future.
4. Institution-based trust - from calculus-based and relational trust, the institution offers the support to maintain this trust.

Rousseau also notes that "institutional controls can also undermine trust, particularly where legal mechanisms give rise to rigidity in responses," which may be a concern within the field of urban planning in particular (1998:400). In order for city planning to function with resident input, trust is required between residents and planners—for residents, trust that the planners have their best interests at heart, and for planners, trust in the experiences that residents share from living in their neighborhoods. Additionally, it is important to study trust between residents themselves, as this is often the basis for residents' formation of organizations to advocate for their own interests to the government. Literature on trust has kept trust in neighbors and trust in government distinct, since the former tends to be rooted in relationships while the latter tends to be rooted in the belief in institutions (Putnam 2000). I will continue this practice in my examination of the concept in the following subsections.

*Neighborhood Trust*

Considered a seminal sociological text, Robert D. Putnam's "Bowling Alone" (2000) examines trust within neighborhoods within the context of generalized reciprocity. He writes, "Members of a community that follows the principle of generalized reciprocity—raking your leaves before they blow onto your neighbors' yard, lending a dime to a stranger for a parking meter, buying a round of drinks the week you earn overtime, keeping an eye on a friend's house, taking turns bringing snacks to Sunday school, caring for the child of the crack-head one flight down—find that their self-interest is served" (2000:140). Thus, contributing to their community further strengthens the social ties they have to that community and enhances their calculus-based and relational trust for one another because they are able to witness how their social connection makes reciprocity more likely.

One of Putnam's points is of particular importance regarding reported levels of trust: trust seems to be a form of privilege. In America those who are Black, who struggle financially, and those who have experienced crime are less likely to express social trust. According to Putnam, this shouldn't be interpreted as a psychological difference, but reflective of actual experience. Those who express high levels of social trust are those who have been "treated by others with more honesty and respect" (2000:144), meaning that social trust likely diverges along certain demographic lines and can be harder to build within neighborhoods with less privileged demographics.

Putnam also notes that there have been declines in social trust over time, with fewer people each year agreeing that "most people can be trusted" and more people each year agreeing "you can't be too careful dealing with people" (2000:146). What's more, is that the decline in

trust is even steeper among younger people than it is among older people. Each generational cohort remains at about the same levels of trust over time, but there is a clear decline between generational cohorts (ibid). We will examine more about how these dynamics of trust influence participation in the section on Social Organization.

*The Trust of Residents*

Recent failures of public systems such as the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and other doubts to the legitimacy of government officials and offices have caused "a tremendous global trust crisis," which has left many people feeling deeper senses of mistrust for others, especially institutions like the government, and necessitates research previously occupied with the process of building trust on an individual level to instead focus on institution-based trust (Bachman 2011:209). Institution-based trust can be understood as a combination of calculus-based trust, which looks at competence based on knowledge, and relational trust, which looks at reliability based on interactions over time (Rousseau et al 1998).

Extant literature exploring the relationship between urban planning and trust has largely focused on the need for planners to think about resident trust, yet the relationship between residents' trust and engagement remains somewhat complicated. Lack of trust from residents can make it hard for planners to effectively engage communities, especially communities whose past has been marred with harms from developers, such as racial or ethnic minorities (Patrick et al 2017), but there is also evidence to suggest that lack of trust may, in some cases, encourage participation when combined with "high political efficacy" (Laurian 2009:379). In these scenarios, residents may perceive themselves as "watchdogs" who are determined to participate, while those with higher levels of trust in planners or government officials assume those in

authority are already acting in their best interest without any need for their input. Instead of seeking to understand what factors work in tandem with trust to influence these outcomes, more energy has been spent by planners struggling to increase trust among residents in local communities by sharing plans with the public for feedback (ibid). Therefore, it's beneficial for this thesis to examine the factors that detract from trust and the ways in which trust influences the engagement process.

*The Trust of Planners*

The trust that planners have in residents has not been directly studied, however there have been adjacent studies on planners' perceptions of resident input. These perceptions could influence how planners interpret resident input and therefore how trustworthy or valuable it is deemed in the planning process. Using a survey in Sweden, Astrom (2020) found that the majority of planners thought that citizens were sincere in their engagements, but few planners thought that citizens were knowledgeable about city affairs or how the local government worked. This study, while conducted outside of the US, can still be applied when considering the opinions of US planners who work for the government due to the similar roles of planners in both countries. There may be additional cultural differences that shape these responses, but I consider these negligent when comparing their work. The opinions of the planners in Astrom's work are likely swayed in the positive direction in terms of trust due to being government employees (ibid), leaving further questions about how planners who work privately but are contracted by the government feel.

One of the applications of this trust to planning is the question of whether or not and when planners will take into serious consideration the thoughts and preferences of the people

within the communities in which they have been hired to work. In 2019, Geoffrey A. Battista and Kevin Manaugh conducted a survey of transportation planners across the US and Canada to measure how they traded off between their expert knowledge and community input when making decisions. They chose to classify planning styles on an axis of whether the planners' approach was "top-down" or "bottom-up" and on the other axis whether the planner was "positivistic" or "normative." At these intersections, the top-down positivistic planner was considered "technical", the top-down normative planner was considered "political," while the bottom-up versions of these planners were considered "collaborative" or "advocate" respectively (2019:1275) . While this study focused on transportation planners, the authors point out that these "transportation planning styles coincide with urban planning typologies in general" (Battista and Manaugh 2019:1281). They also found that there were "strong associations between institutional factors and planning style" such that "institutional and training measures are reliable predictors of transportation planners' professional attitudes" (Battista and Manaugh 2019:1286). This suggests that if the training planners receive and the institutions that they are a part of are mainly responsible for shaping their practice, their views on trust of residents are more reflective of that training and those institutions than personal characteristics. My research seeks to specifically understand how these conceptions of trust trickle down to affect their specific practices.

## OWNERSHIP

### *Defining Ownership*

I conceptualize a "sense of ownership" as a feeling or conviction that combines responsibility and the ability to make changes to the physical aspects of the area in which one is

living, both over individual property and communal property. Lachapelle (2008) forms a more thorough three-part definition of ownership as it applies to community development:

1. “a sense of ownership in process (who has a voice and who is heard?);
2. a sense of ownership in outcome (who has influence over decisions and what results from the effort?);
3. a sense of ownership distribution (who is affected by the process and outcome?)" (2008:53).

These three aspects of ownership become intertwined within the current structures in place for shaping the city—namely, the top-down approach, begun by the upper class in the 1800s and relegated to local governments in the 1900s and following years (Fainstein 2022). Additionally, this structure means that ownership is a give and take between residents and planners, with the planners exerting most of the control on how that give and take happens.

While I often refer to this concept as “ownership” it should more accurately be understood as “sense of ownership,” in that the properties being acted upon are not necessarily the property of the resident or planner. Durkheim asserts in his commentary on Tonnies’ theory that within the community (the tight knit bonds associated with rural or familial ties), property and land are owned by the collective. “Each works not for compensation,” he notes, “but because it is his natural function” as a member of the group that has ownership (Aldous, Durkheim, and Tonnies 1972:1195). To contrast, within society (very loose bonds associated with urbanism), possession is individualized. Property is transferred upon work for wages and each person does what is needed to benefit themselves and their own personal stakes (ibid).

*Planner's Sense*

Planners' perceptions regarding their sense of ownership has not been previously studied, but their perception on their role has been, which can give us a preliminary understanding of how elements of ownership might fit into existing ways of thinking. Fox-Rogers and Murphy conducted a qualitative survey of planners in Ireland to get a sense of how planners perceived their role within the communities where they worked. The survey found that many planners considered themselves to be a "mediator" or an "administrator," with the former being the most common (2016:84). The role of the mediator for planners could be described as "mediating between competing interests in order to bring about more balanced outcomes" (2016:84). The researchers also note that in their study, as well as similar studies conducted previously, planners were "reluctant or confused when invited to talk normatively about the values which underpin the planning system (2016:84). Indeed, over half (55%) of the planners interviewed as part of this study either explicitly or implicitly referred to the fact that they are rarely asked to describe the role of the planner" (ibid). This indicates that planners do not reflect as regularly on their role, but when they do introspect, they primarily identify their jobs as bridging the gap between residents and resources.

*Resident's Sense*

While my definition of ownership transcends individual property, there have been links that associate home ownership and community participation, though the underlying mechanisms of this relationship are unclear. For example, the concentration of household wealth in owner occupied homes could increase homeowners' attention to local communities and make them

more responsive to local policies affecting their property values, leading them to participate more in local politics and community groups. It may also be because, by virtue of owning their own, they have more stability locally and are thus more likely to get involved (McCabe 2013).

Looking beyond this more obvious form of ownership, however, I aim to dig deeper into what else contributes to residents' developing a sense of ownership over their neighborhood and community. One way that ownership can manifest itself is through the handling of observed disorder. Common visual indicators of neighborhood disorder include broken windows, damaged signage, and graffiti. Sampson's (2012) work within Chicago is critical to understanding perceptions of disorder and their impacts on neighborhood identity. He writes that what we consider disorder is "shaped by social conditions," and the "meanings of disorder…need to be a central part of our understanding of neighborhood change" (Sampson 2012:123), which means that perceptions of certain kinds of disorder—like graffiti—could change over time. As Sampson points out, "disorder by the disadvantaged often consists of doing many things in public that would be (and are) legitimate in private" (2012:133). My research looks at graffiti as an example of one of these forms. Unlike other forms of disorder that require little effort and can often be considered crimes of opportunity, graffiti in many cases is a form of artistic practice. It requires forethought on what one wants to say, and what form they will say it in. It requires the purchase of spray paint outside of the city, due to its illegal nature within the city of Chicago. It requires the identification of a canvas and a mode of scaling that location. Is it a form of ownership to take on such artistic work? Is it a form of ownership to despise and remove it from your personal property? Through engaging with residents who have observed the presence of graffiti in their neighborhoods, I will explore how ownership plays a role in both the appreciation and hatred of this work.

After clarifying his ownership definition, Lachapelle (2008) goes on to explain that ownership can only come about if people are given some degree of control. When residents are expected to consult without being given any degree of power, it can lead them to becoming more apathetic and less likely to participate. Lachapelle goes on to claim that ownership and trust are positively correlated, with higher levels of trust being associated with higher potential for ownership (ibid). These concepts of ownership and trust manifest in people's actions through social organization and collective efficacy.

## SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

### *Group Engagement*

While the number of organizations within the U.S. has increased over the past few decades, community involvement hasn't necessarily increased (Putnam 2000). Coming back to "Bowling Alone" Putnam writes that now "groups focus on expressing policy views" more often than "providing regular connection among individual members at the grass roots" (2000:60). His research points out that each generation seems to be committing less and less time to the organizations they find themselves being associated with, "dropping out in droves not merely from political life but from organized community life for generally" (2000:73). Putnam also acknowledges the connection between lack of trust and lack of active membership in these groups for civic engagement, noting that there is a strong correlation between social trust (born of the generalized reciprocity explained in the previous section) and civic engagement (participation in groups that shape the neighborhood) (ibid). In his research he was referring to religious and community organizations, through which one needed to work to take political or social action. My study, while still asking some residents about their involvement with these

groups, also looks at individual contributions which, while still often involve community members operating collectively, do not require as much regular dedication to an organization.

What's interesting is that while Putnam reports Black Americans having less social trust, the racial differences in group membership are not large, with Black Americans actually belonging to more groups than White Americans on average when "controlling for educational and income differences" (2000:285). This pattern indicates that social mistrust can be overcome, and group efficacy encouraged among populations where it might be difficult to foster due to lack of trust. It also raises questions about the differences between the groups where social trust is high and groups where social trust is lower. In his book, "Great American City: Chicago and The Enduring Neighborhood Effect," Robert J. Sampson (2012) discusses this in citing William F. Whyte's argument on the apparent disorganization within socioeconomically deprived neighborhoods. "What looks like social disorganization from the outside is actually an internal organization," he writes, "its social organization fails to mesh with the larger structure of society around it" (Sampson 2012:38).

Sampson also introduces the concept of collective efficacy, which requires some form of social trust, but transcends it to consider the desire for, not only reciprocation, but control. "This theoretical framework," he writes, "recognizes the transformed landscape of contemporary urban life and assumes that while community efficacy may depend on some level of working trust and social interaction, it does not require that neighbors or local police officers be one's friend. Institutional mechanisms may be sufficient" (Sampson 2012:152). What Sampson is suggesting is that in areas where there exist organizations designed for action regarding the state of the neighborhood, social trust is not relied on as heavily for action to come about. He also notes, however, that lack of resources can hinder the ability of these neighborhoods to take action

through these groups. This suggests that within Chicago, lack of trust can be overcome with community organization efforts, but only to the degree that there are resources available to them; it will be harder for disadvantaged communities to make use of their organizational structures.

*Neighborhood Solidarity*

Another topic key to understanding social organization is the relationships being built between neighbors. Ferdinand Tonnies's classic writing distinguishes the community (*Gemeinschaft*) in which a group shares common bonds, values, and objectives based on being together and natural emotion, from the society (*Gesellschaft*) in which a group shares values and objectives based on rational agreement and indirect social ties (Aldous, Durkheim, and Tonnies 1972). Durkheim built on this in a review of Tonnies' work, noting that beyond family ties was the stronger bond of shared space (ibid). By "the sole fact of being in the neighborhood and the relations that derive from it, families, until then independent, aggregate together," he states (Aldous, Durkheim, and Tonnies 1972:1194). However, Durkheim would not necessarily expect to apply this concept of community to a "great city of today" like Chicago, because to him the growth of life in the city meant the end of the *Gemeinschaft*, not its evolution (Aldous, Durkheim, and Tonnies 1972:1194).

Tonnies and Durkheim (1972) shared the opinion that urbanization was ending the *Gemeinschaft*, and once a city surpassed a certain size that kind of social bond was no longer possible. In some ways they are right—the personal ties needed for *Gemeinschaft* are not possible across the entirety of a large modern city, but as Richard Sennet (1977) pointed out, this community bond can still be found along ethnic lines or in smaller communities within the city. In Chicago for example, this phenomenon can be studied due to the various official and

unofficial subsections the city is regularly broken down into. For example, it could be said that the neighborhoods act as communities and are infused with identity and reinforced with the bond of local living, while the wards or other government barriers behave as societies, drawn by officials without regard to identity and values, but held together by the necessity of function. There is room for conflict when these community lines do not match up with societal lines, and when the different motivations (community wanting to benefit one another, and society wanting to profit) become apparent.

*The Role of Neighborhoods*

Of all the communities that might be present within a city, the neighborhood, based on "proximity and neighborly contact" as described by Robert E. Park, is "the simplest and most elementary form of association with which we have to do in the organization of city life" (1915:580). To him the neighborhood is the "the basis of political control" because of membership being due to residence and "local sentiment" being harnessed (1915:580). However, he also says that neighborhoods have no "formal organization," with formal associations being built on top of the organic developments (1915:578). Within cities today, there are many moving parts that require a more comprehensive definition, and Jane Jacobs' foundational work sheds light on this.

In "The Death and Life of Great American Cities" (1961), Jane Jacobs outlines her theory on three types of neighborhoods:

1. The city as a whole - the "parent community…from which most public money flows" and "where most administrative and policy decisions are made" (p. 153).

2. The street neighborhoods - "the miniscule neighborhoods" that "weave webs of public surveillance," and "grow networks of small-scale, everyday public life and thus…trust and social control" (p. 157).
3. the district - the neighborhood whose job is "to mediate between the indispensable, but inherently politically powerless, street neighborhoods, and the inherently powerful city as a whole" (p. 158).

Within my research, this can be roughly applied to (1) the whole city of Chicago, (2) the community areas, and (3) the wards. According to Jacobs, the districts—or wards—play the most crucial role when it comes to self-governance in their role as mediators. Issues arise, however, when the people within the district don't identify themselves with it or there are competing interests from multiple street neighborhoods within. Additionally, the district faces challenges when not all districts are fighting the city for power on behalf of their constituents. There then arise projects when an alderman may not be able to speak up on an issue for fear that the other districts will not come to their aid on others, a challenge we will reflect on further in the findings.

Within neighborhoods, there is more at play than just reciprocity which incentivizes people to work and live in harmony together. One of the misconceptions about these benefits is the notion of "salvation by bricks" which suggests that simply improving the physical environment helps improve the social conditions (Jacobs 1961:147). Jacobs dismantles this notion, stating that it is inaccurate because there are other things that must be improved in tandem with the physical environment for real change to take place (ibid). However, this doesn't address the reality that people desire to live in a nice place, nor the question of the extent to which their physical environment makes them believe it to be true. To put it more directly, to what extent are people's behavior within their neighborhood influenced by the quality of the

physical environment and their interpretations of it? How do these people influence the environment in return?

## SUMMARY

Building on this theoretical foundation and using the city of Chicago as a case study, this thesis will demonstrate how ownership, trust, and engagement influence one another among residents and planners alike. Trust, dissected into its various forms—deterrence-based, calculus-based, relational, and institution-based—underpins the interactions between residents, planners, and institutions, influencing the level and manner of civic engagement. The literature reveals that trust can be a form of privilege, with significant variations across demographic lines and a notable decline over time, especially among younger generations. The trust of residents, particularly in the wake of global crises, and the trust held by planners, colored by their professional background and institutional affiliations, both play pivotal roles in shaping urban planning and community relations. Ownership, extending beyond mere property rights to encompass a broader sense of control and responsibility, is intricately linked to community development and participation. The concept encompasses ownership in process, outcome, and distribution, reflecting a complex interplay between individual and communal stakes in urban spaces. The perspectives of planners and residents on ownership reveal diverse understandings and expectations, which are crucial in shaping urban dynamics. Finally, the decline in active community involvement, despite the increase in the number of organizations, highlights a shift in group dynamics and civic participation. Collective efficacy, neighborhood solidarity, and the role of neighborhoods in political and social life emerge as crucial factors in modern community engagement strategies. The tension between the concepts of Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft, as

well as the influence of the physical environment on social conditions, provides a nuanced understanding of urban life and community participation.

In the following chapters, my own research will seek to elaborate on or fill in the gaps of the literature discussed in this chapter. My first findings chapter will examine how demographic differences across Chicago can impact trust and ownership. My second findings chapter unpacks resident and planner conceptions of ownership, the difference in participation between renters and owners, and action across both communal and individual property. My third and final findings chapter navigates how mistrust in the government, planners, and even one's fellow neighbors can impact engagement, and the ways that planners could potentially improve these outcomes.

# CONTEXT

In this chapter, I provide context that clarifies the content of my research, particularly with regard to its setting and the definitions of engagement that I explore throughout the rest of the thesis. First, I define engagement through three terms: city-mediated action, DIY action, and community-engaged planning. I then explain how each of these initiative types currently present within the city of Chicago, and relevant literature explaining their rationale and effectiveness (or lack thereof).

## ENGAGEMENT

In addition to understanding the history and setting of Chicago, it is also necessary to distinguish key terms and provide context on how these terms manifest themselves within the city. When I assert that ownership and trust influence participation in shaping the city, I am referring to three different spheres of participation—city-mediated action, DIY action, and community-engaged planning. For the sake of this study, the following definitions for these spheres will be employed:

1. **City-mediated action:** when the government allows for residents to take action and assert some ownership over the community (ex: buying vacant lots for $1 or large discounts, giving space for public art or performance, etc.).
2. **DIY action:** when residents pursue action to improve their communities without permission of the government, sometimes in ways that are illegal (ex: gardening in a lot without buying it, public art without permission, etc.)

3. **Community-engaged planning**: when the government or urban planning firms solicit community insight. The community is not involved in the actual process of changing the community, only influencing it through their opinions.

I elaborate on the manifestations of each of these within the city of Chicago in the sections below.

## CITY-MEDIATED ACTION

*Vacant Lots – Chicago's Large Lots Program*

The most prevalent form of city-mediated action cities have been using is programs that allow residents to purchase city-owned vacant land for a reduced price if they are able to create a plan for the space (these lots are often turned into housing or community gardens) and take care of it, giving ownership back to individual members of these neighborhoods. In Chicago this manifested itself as the Large Lots program, a city initiative aimed at helping "property owners, block clubs, and non-profit groups in select Chicago neighborhoods…purchase City-owned land for $1 per parcel" (City of Chicago n.d.). It was a part of a larger goal to improve neighborhoods and housing (over 41,000 units across the city), running on a pilot basis from 2014-2018 (ibid).

While the impact of these programs can vary from city to city, studies have found that in Chicago, this type of action yields positive results such as lowering crime rates, poverty rates, unemployment rates, and increasing the median property value (Chen and Conroy 2023). These associations, however, are also associated with a reduction in neighborhood greenness, suggesting that they are present in areas where vacant lots are not being converted into community gardens or parks. This is confirmed by Park and Ciorici (2013), who found that vacant lots had a higher chance of being converted into community gardens in higher-income

neighborhoods where a higher proportion of residents had completed an undergraduate education. This means that the demands for urban greening in the context of the Large Lots program are concentrated in neighborhoods where there is evidence of gentrification already taking place (Rigolon et al 2020). More research is needed to establish whether this is something that residents are aware of and whether or not it plays a role in their decision to participate as well as their decision on what they will build.

Wide-spread interest in the program and success with sales led a similar program to be relaunched in November 2022, this time on a portal called ChiBlockBuilder. Applications from residents were accepted until February 2023. Residents could apply on the site for lots with plans to create housing, a side yard, commercial development, or open space for community such as gardens or parks. The first-round data shows that there were over 1,600 applications received with 664 of those being for affordable housing and 231 being for open spaces (City of Chicago 2023). This is significant because it suggests less interest in collective ownership and improvement, and more interest in individual ownership and improvement, which could reveal interesting connections between community-engagement, trust, and ownership.

Regardless of the kind of application approved, neighborhood beautification has been reported as a positive effect within studies of this Chicago program. Focus groups with recipients of Large Lots revealed that this resident-led beautification helped create a sense of place attachment and sense of community (Steward et al 2019), which could increase participation in future community-engagement activities (Manzo et al 2006). And though the decreased crime was found to be associated with decreased green space (Chen and Conroy 2023), it was also associated with improved visual quality (Hadavi et al 2021) and empowerment to take control of one's own community (Rigolon et al 2021)(Rupp et al 2020).

*Ownership Norms in Relation to Land Use*

The previously mentioned benefits of this kind of city-mediated action are amazing but work off current assumptions of property. But what makes the city something that needs to be bought or a space occupation something that necessitates permission? Noterman (2021) explores how, in Philadelphia, the Poor People's Economic Human Rights Campaign (PPEHRC) organizes collective occupations to meet the immediate needs of the poor and houseless based on an understanding of a shared right to property. It suggests that everyday acts of repossession can shift our understanding of property and ownership, which begs the question: within Chicago, how do conceptions of individual property (like homes or yards) versus communal property (parks or community gardens) influence the types of action taken within the neighborhood at large? It also suggests that there may be some who seek to make change in their communities without permission (or DIY action), a phenomenon that also deserves attention to understand the full scope of resident-led city-shaping actions.

## DIY ACTION

Increased research has been done on residents who take the state of their neighborhoods into their own hands, whether through "guerilla greening," "spontaneous streetscaping," or "aspirational urbanism," and the way these forms of community engagement challenge the efficiency of normative structures dictating who has the right to change a neighborhoods infrastructure (Douglas 2014:6). Rather than getting permission from some city office, these people do it themselves, not willing to wait on the city's bureaucratic processes to allow them to do what they want.

Research on this form of community engagement reveals that these populations are usually White, middle class, millennial renters (Thorpe 2018)(Douglas 2014), and the most important thing that many of these DIYers discuss is ownership. Their sense of ownership over property is derived through self-expression, which is made possible by their DIY efforts (Thorpe 2018). Coming back to ideas of trust, interviews with these residents who engage in DIY action reveal a divided response on whether they would prefer the city to make the changes that they are. There is a "widespread frustration with the bureaucracy of the planning processes and a common feeling that the city does not or would not do it right anyway" (Douglass 2014:16). Connecting this to the framework of trust developed earlier, this suggests that residents who participate in DIY action have less trust in their city government due to lack of competence and reliability.

In some forms of DIY action, such as street art, there is also an integral element of illegality that makes the act what it is (Chackal 2016). However, the interviews with average residents engaging in DIY action within the city revealed that most DIY actors aren't intending to stir the pot—they just genuinely want to help the city based on specific problems they see, like potholes or a lack of bike lanes (Douglas 2014). What remains unexplored, is the way in which participation in DIY action influences the participation in city-mediated action. Even less explored, is the connection between actions and involvement without action, such as community-engaged planning.

## COMMUNITY-ENGAGED PLANNING

Community-engaged planning refers to a form of urban planning that purposefully involves residents of the area being planned in the feedback and/or decision-making process

(Patrick et al 2017). In 1989, Lalli and Thomas investigated public attitudes towards town planning measures in a city where there was a controversial development taking place. The findings revealed that the public opinion did not align with the official plans, indicating a discrepancy between public sentiment and the dominant perception portrayed in the media (Lalli and Thomas 1989). This provides a concrete example of why genuine public engagement is needed to create public spaces that serve what the public truly needs, especially if we aim to create more socially just and inclusive urban environments (Bonakdar and Audirac 2020). Increased research on this phenomenon of community-engaged planning has revealed that a multidimensional approach to planning is necessary, given that it is design's interaction with culture that gives it meaning (Jabareen and Zilberman 2017).

Furthermore, community engagement has been shown to impact residents' sense of ownership, which can be a powerful tool to create positive outcomes where communities may otherwise be negatively affected. For example, in Philadelphia residents around a new park were surveyed (91% of respondents were Black) and said that they felt they had a voice in what happened at the park and that it was a community asset (Mullenbach et al 2019). The significance of this finding is even more striking given the demographics of the survey and the "recent research on how park investments can negatively impact existing residents, especially low-income and ethnic minority residents" (2019:213). This sense of ownership in process that was able to be developed will continue to take the forefront of discussions, especially as we consider the best available methods through which to engage residents.

*We Will Chicago*

A major recent example of community-engaged planning is The We Will Chicago Plan. The We Will Chicago Plan is "a 10-year framework to enhance citywide equity and resiliency," created through "three years of intensive neighborhood-based and virtual public engagement" (City of Chicago 2022:5). It is a combination of goals, broken down into more tangible objectives, spread across major themes or "pillars" of concern for residents and community leaders created by diverse research teams of those stakeholders along with city staff and organization representatives selected from applications in 2021.[4] As of February 2023, the plan was adopted by the city council along with its policy recommendations, and the city has made some progress on each of these pillars already, which they have published online for residents to view (City of Chicago 2023). Little research has been done, however, on how this participatory process has left residents feeling, especially when compared to other ways in which they might go about influencing their communities.

*Instances of Infectivity*

Despite the positive elements that can come from citizen participation in planning, it is still contested in the literature about its overall value (Innes and Booher 2004). It has the potential to be counterproductive, encouraging polarizing discourse to make points heard and discouraging participation from residents who feel the process is just for show (ibid). Irvin and

[4] The We Will Chicago Pillars were Housing & Neighborhoods; Arts & Culture; Environment, Climate & Energy; Lifelong Learning; Public Health & Safety; Transportation & Infrastructure; Civic & Community Engagement; and Economic Development.

Stansbury (2004) recognize that there are situations where community participation is beneficial and when it is not. The problem with their analysis of these situations, however, is that they fail to ascribe a weight to the various costs and the benefits they lay out. Some of the key identifiers of communities that might not benefit from community participation, such as citizens being reluctant to get involved, the presence of many competing socio-economic groups, or low-income residents being key stakeholders, are descriptive of many, if not all, historically marginalized groups. It would then follow that these communities shouldn't be engaged, when in reality, these are the communities where it is most needed to combat historical injustices. The authors raise valid concerns about whether this kind of engagement will be effective, however, which further incentivizes my research into how these communities might be shaping their neighborhoods in other ways.

*Determinants of Involvement*

When community-engaged planning is made available and advertised to residents, participation is not always guaranteed. Examining the intersection of urban planning and sociological research from the past few decades, reveals that "thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about…local community places…[influence] whether and how we might participate in local planning efforts," especially place attachment (Manzo and Perkins 2006:336). Place attachment, in addition to being caused by the increased ownership of once-vacant lots (Stewart 2019) is driven primarily by elements of the built environment (Leyden et al 2011). In fact, spatial variables, such as place attachment, building density, and public transport, have been found to have a larger impact on participation overall than any socio-demographic factors (Bottini 2018). This means that most determinants of involvement are environmental such as quality shared

public spaces (Zhu 2015). This can pose a challenge in a city like Chicago, where the voices that need to be amplified the most are those whose environments have historically been treated in ways which make place attachment harder to form and thus participation less likely.

In summary, I employ the terms city-mediated action, DIY action, and community-engaged planning to describe the various engagement practices currently being used by residents and planners. In the next chapter, I unpack the various methods I use to examine trust and ownership across the city of Chicago.

# METHODOLOGY

This chapter details the research methods I use in this study to answer my overarching research question: how do sense of ownership and trust influence the ways people engage with shaping the physical nature of the city? I combined qualitative and quantitative methods to address this question, utilizing in-depth interviews, ethnographic observation, participant observation (which I distinguish based on my level of active participation within the environment), and statistical analysis of city-wide data sets. I employed thematic analysis in my qualitative research to inductively identify key themes and interpret the experiences shared with me by study participants and the experiences I observed first-hand. Within my quantitative data analysis, I combine descriptive and inferential statistics to present a comprehensive picture of how key variables such as owner occupation rate, hardship, trust in local government, and more are distributed across the city of Chicago and how they are correlated to one another. Finally, I conclude with ethical considerations I took into account including anonymity, confidentiality, informed consent, and my own positionality.

## SELECTION OF METHODOLOGIES

In order to best understand the experiences of residents who involve themselves in shaping the city, I utilized a mixed methods approach, combining both qualitative and quantitative data. This strategy offers the best insights into my research questions because, while both qualitative and quantitative data provide valuable insights on their own, I believe that together they are able to provide a more complete understanding of social phenomena. Quantitative data shows, within each community area, the concentration of important metrics, and can answer questions regarding the correlation between these variables. Qualitative data, on

the other hand, reveals necessary themes within an individual's stories and experiences, answering questions about people's perceptions and what relationships or ideas lead them to act the way that they do.

Within the context of my research, quantitative data helps answer questions such as: how do the number of residents who own their homes vary across the city? How does the number of people who believe their neighborhoods are free of litter vary across the city? How do reports on graffiti to the city for cleanup vary across the city? How much vacant land does the city own in various Chicago neighborhoods? How are these metrics related? On the other hand, qualitative observations provide insight into questions regarding people's attitudes and experiences, such as: what do residents think about the differences in renters' and owners' engagement? How do they understand the presence of vacant land or graffiti in residents' neighborhoods as an indicator of their community's status or sense of responsibility? How do residents conceptualize trust of local government officials and planners in these community development processes? In conversation with one another, both of these kinds of data provide the most complete picture of Chicago residents' experiences in shaping their neighborhoods and this triangulation of data enhances the credibility of my findings.

Within my qualitative work, I incorporated multiple social scientific methods including ethnography, participant observations, and in-depth interviews. The in-depth interviews are given priority within my findings and analysis, as they provide the main source of citizen experiences from which to discern experiential themes and recurring resident ideas. In this chapter, I explain my rationale for incorporating each of these methods and the means with which I carried them out.

## IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

### *Structure and Questioning*

The qualitative aspect of this research relied significantly on original in-depth interviews to explore the experiences of residents within the city of Chicago. Through 29 interviews I conducted from May-August 2023, I sought to capture insights into participants' perceptions, feelings, and experiences regarding their involvement (or lack thereof) in community-shaping activities and urban development. These interviews followed a semi-structured approach, allowing for flexibility while maintaining some consistency across interviews. The discussion began with inquiries about their neighborhoods and affiliations with community organizations and evolved to explore their sense of ownership over their neighborhoods and sense of trust with local government, neighbors, and planners. These questions touched on categories based on their involvement, covering participation in We Will Chicago, the Large Lots Program and/or ChiBlockBuilder, DIY action, community engagement meetings, and/or calling 311. The full interview guide can be found in Appendix I. This thematic progression facilitated a comprehensive understanding of their roles and experiences within their neighborhoods.

### *Sampling*

In order to capture a wide range of viewpoints, and also observe geographic differences within the city of Chicago, I chose to sample for range: my interview participants are from the North, South, and West Sides. The initial sampling strategy was to distribute a survey through local aldermen (Appendix II). The city of Chicago is divided up into 50 wards, many of which have a newsletter or Facebook page to communicate with their constituents. I reached out to each

of these aldermen asking if they would be willing to include my survey in their newsletter or on their Facebook page to help with my research. I received a response back from only 6 aldermanic offices, mostly concentrated among neighborhoods on the North Side. To enhance geographical diversity from there, I reached out to community organizations on the South and West Sides with Facebook pages or email lists to target these residents more directly. I also used snowball sampling, and I asked my interviewees to refer me to any other residents in their neighborhoods who they thought might be willing to fill out my survey and/or be interviewed, aiding in the inclusion of perspectives from underrepresented areas, particularly the South Side.

In total, I interviewed 29 residents; 3 who chose not to disclose their location, 13 from the North, 3 from the West, and 10 from the South. I sought out interviews from residents who work in urban planning and community organizing as well as those who don't, to understand the perspectives from both sides of the engagement process: the people seeking out the engagement of residents and the residents themselves. My interviews yielded perspectives from 7 planners, 8 community organizers, and 14 residents who worked in neither field. I interviewed people who have opted-in to some of the city's available initiatives because I am interested in the social observations of those who are interested in participating, as opposed to those who are generally uninterested. This is a valuable set of people because, while there are some people who would never engage in shaping their environments regardless of the circumstances, I am interested in what interactions and perceptions are holding back those interested in participating from doing so in their fullest capacity. Within the interviews, my questions were largely based on the experiences of the interviewee I was speaking with, divided into several major categories, with participants in We Will Chicago, The Large Lots Program or ChiBlockBuilder, DIY planning

efforts, community meetings, and calling 311. The full breakdown of demographics is available in Table 1.

Table 1: Interviewee Demographics

| Demographic | Total Number |
|---|---|
| Total Interviewees | 29 |
| **Gender** | |
| Female | 18 |
| Male | 11 |
| **Occupation** | |
| Planners | 7 |
| Community Organizers | 8 |
| Residents (not in the above) | 14 |
| **Location** | |
| North Side of Chicago | 13 |
| South Side of Chicago | 10 |
| West Side of Chicago | 3 |
| Location Not Disclosed | 3 |
| **Ethnicity** | |
| White | 14 |
| Black | 7 |
| Hispanic | 2 |
| Native American | 2 |
| Asian | 2 |
| Race Not Disclosed | 2 |
| **Age** | |
| Over 65 | 8 |
| 45-64 | 9 |
| 25-44 | 8 |
| 18-24 | 1 |
| Age Not Disclosed | 3 |

*Data Collection and Analysis Tools*

Interviews were conducted predominantly over the Zoom platform, which allowed for virtual interactions and ensured a safe and convenient environment for participants. They were an hour long on average and recorded within the Zoom platform. For interviews that took place in person or over the phone, recording was handled by the Apple Voice Memo app. The subsequent transcription of interviews was assisted with Otter.ai, aiding in the accurate

preservation of participants' narratives. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns and themes within the interview data, assisted by NVivo software, which will be further discussed in the Analysis section.

## ETHNOGRAPHIC OBSERVATION

Prior to this research, I was unfamiliar with the city of Chicago. Desiring to better grasp the city's dynamics, cultural fabric, and disparities between neighborhoods, as well as the lived experiences of planners working to mend the fabric of the city, I decided to gather firsthand experiences and insights through ethnographic observations. For a month and a half (from May-June 2023), I lived in an apartment on Chicago's North side. During that time, I worked at a design firm in the urban planning division, and I hoped to observe the preparation for and participation of planners in community-engagement meetings, the process of engaging with clients across the city, and gaining a deeper understanding of the methods through which planners connected with their projects and the residents who they wanted to get feedback from.

Through this work I was able to develop relationships with urban planners at this firm, and others included in my study, including some that worked for the city or county. My work for the firm was somewhat limited: contributing research and writing, participation at a community-engagement meeting, notes during discussions with clients, etc. Through this process, however, I was able to better understand the complexities involved with the practical implications of residents' engagement in shaping their surroundings. At a meeting on the South side of Chicago, which I attended as a part of my job shadowing experience, I helped display data maps and engage people walking by. Detailed field notes were taken to document observations, interactions, and reflections on the experiences encountered. These notes provide important

context to inform the analysis and interpretation of interviewee narratives, as well as a few stories to complement their observations.

I distinguish my ethnographic observations from the participant observation (which I will explain below) based on my own level of engagement or visibility within the setting. While working at the urban design firm, it was known that I was there as a researcher, and I was making observations on the events I was directly engaging in and my own experiences. The data I gathered through participant observation, on the other hand, was done in a purely observational sense, meaning that I did not do anything to disturb the course of the meeting or engage in any way as a participant or an organizer. They are intertwined in their necessity: to provide the necessary context I needed to understand the responses of interviewees. However, due to the differences in the way I conducted myself when collecting the data, I see it fitting to distinguish these as two separate methods.

**PARTICIPANT OBSERVATION**

During my time in Chicago, I had the opportunity to seek out community-engagement meetings in which residents, local government officials, and planners could be observed. I incorporated this participant observation in my study in order to enhance my understanding of residents' roles within these settings and their interactions with those running the meeting. Selection of these events was based on what was taking place while I was in Chicago, and my desire to witness a variety of formats and locations. I observed a total of 4 meetings. Two of these meetings were in-person, and two were online. Two of these meetings were general ward meetings, and two were based on specific infrastructural proposals.

During these conversations I took on an observatory role, as I did not want my presence to interrupt the flow of the meeting or influence the way anyone behaved. At each of these opportunities, I was able to take note of the structure of the meeting, the setting, the subjects discussed, which voices found expression, and the manner in which comments and questions were received. These observations were recorded with detailed field notes, as well as audio recordings and photos to ensure every part of the meeting could be captured.

Separate from these conversations was also the opportunity to observe recordings of research team meetings from the Housing & Neighborhoods Pillar of the We Will Chicago Plan. As a part of We Will Chicago, there were 7 research teams, each composed of a team of residents selected from applications to the city to participate. The research team meetings that I observed were from the Housing & Neighborhoods Pillar, which focused on how the city could improve its policy related to the availability of housing, the ways people could shape their neighborhoods, and how engagement with the city in these regards had impacted them. Each of these recordings was approximately 1.5-2 hours in length, and I observed 8 recordings total. I watched each of these recordings from start to finish, taking note of relevant themes and topics of discussion similarly to how I recorded observations at the community-engagement meetings I observed in-person. The insights from all of these participant observations further enrich the interview data by backing up the stories and feelings of the interviewees with examples witnessed and recorded by me in real-time and contribute their own narrative findings on my research questions related to the influence of ownership and trust on people's experiences with city-engagement.

## CITY-WIDE DATA SETS

While my interviews and other qualitative observations form a rich tapestry of stories, in order to better understand these patterns across the city I felt it beneficial to include quantitative data on relevant themes. The quantitative data served as a valuable tool to corroborate and contextualize the qualitative findings, in addition to providing their own answers. The city of Chicago offers many publicly available data sets, collected through surveys of residents that I have included to enhance my qualitative findings.

### *Data Sets and Relevant Variables*

For my study I mainly relied on the data made available through the Chicago Health Atlas. This site compiles data about Chicago from many sources, including the American Community Survey (ACS), the City of Chicago Data Portal, and others. I also use data from the Chicago Parks Department. Throughout my findings chapters, I specify the source of data I am pulling from as well as whether I accessed it from the Chicago Health Atlas or another data source.

### *Relevant Variables*

For my research, the relevant variables I examined included: trust in local government, owner occupied building rates, neighborhood cleanliness, the Hardship Index, the racial composition of each community area, the amount of vacant land owned by the city, and more. The selection of these variables was guided by their relevance to the themes explored through qualitative methods and their potential to contribute meaningful context to the analysis, such as

neighborhood cleanliness as a metric for care and sense of ownership. Within each chapter, I introduce the variables mentioned and explain their relevance to the question I am exploring.

## ANALYTICAL APPROACHES

### *Qualitative Approaches*

In the analysis of my interviews and field notes, I employed thematic analysis to identify common themes across my interviewees' responses. I coded for mentions of challenges or victories related to the resident's alderman with regard to ideas residents proposed or residents perceptions of interactions with them, perceptions surrounding graffiti or murals, the impact of the city's history on their trust or involvement, contributions to sense of ownership, relationship with neighbors, instances where neighbor relationships were helpful in advocacy, feelings surrounding vacant land, the impact of understanding the city on involvement, perceptions of difference between owners and renters, residents' trust in the city, planners' trust in residents, and the impact of ward boundaries on residents. To classify modes of involvement, I also coded for mentions of using the city's 311 service, attending community meetings, participating in DIY action, and involvement in We Will Chicago.

Beyond coding for obvious themes, I also centered the principles of Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis.[5] The open nature of my research questions lent themselves well to this approach, along with the narrative style of much of the data I collected. Through this approach, I strove to understand the underlying thoughts and feelings of my interviewees and synthesize them, while also remaining true to what the interviewees said directly. This process

[5] "Interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) is concerned with the detailed examination of personal lived experience" (Eatough and Smith 2017).

allowed me to pursue an exploratory mindset and employ an inductive approach to identify key themes, building my conclusions around observations I found repeating themselves across multiple interviews.

*Quantitative Approaches*

In the analysis of city-wide data sets, I employ a combination of descriptive and inferential statistics. I use descriptive statistical methods throughout the findings chapters to describe the occurrence of certain phenomena across the city such as racial concentration, presence of public parks, trust in local government, etc. Inferential statistics, on the other hand, I employ to attempt to make connections between different phenomena across the city, and what those connections suggest with regard to my research questions. The primary method of inferential statistics I employ is correlation analysis. While correlation cannot determine the order or cause of variables, it can identify the degree of association between variables. Using this analysis, I compare two variables (such as rates of litter and rates of homeownership) to identify whether or not there appears to be any statistically significant relationship between them. I display these in my findings with tables and graphs that I generated using the R programming language in RStudio.

To run my correlation analysis, I used R, specifically the ggplot2 package, to construct figures that highlight the correlations between selected variables throughout my work. The code snippet:

*geom_smooth(method = "lm") + stat_cor(p.accuracy = 0.001, r.accuracy = 0.001)*

incorporates the methods used within the ggplot2 framework for linear regression analysis and correlation coefficient computations. I used the *geom_smooth* function with the *method = "lm"*

option to fit a linear model to the scatter plots. The least squares method was used in this approach to minimize the sum of squared differences between observed data points and model-predicted values, yielding a linear equation that captures the general trend in the data.

In addition to the graphical representation of the linear model, I incorporated the *stat_cor* function to display the correlation coefficient (denoted as *R*) and its associated p-value directly on the figures. The p-value indicates the statistical significance of the observed correlation, and a value less than 0.001 suggests a highly significant relationship unlikely to occur by random chance. To enhance the precision and clarity of the presented statistical results, I set specific accuracy levels (*p.accuracy = 0.001, r.accuracy = 0.001*) for the displayed p-value and correlation coefficient. This precision control ensures a clear representation of results while maintaining a reasonable level of detail.

## ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

### *Anonymity and Confidentiality*

Throughout the research process, the protection of anonymity has been a paramount concern. All participants' identities, whether interviewees, ethnographic subjects, or engagement meeting attendees, have been meticulously guarded through the use of pseudonyms and adjusted descriptors. This approach mitigates any risk of unintended identification, fostering a climate of trust and safeguarding privacy.

In order to secure that privacy, steps were also taken to ensure confidentiality. Throughout my study, I was the only person with access to my field notes, recordings, and pictures. My field notes and photos were stored locally on an iPad notebook that only I had access to unlock. Interview recordings were also stored locally on my personal computer and

uploaded only to Otter.ai for transcription. Interview transcripts, which were void of personally identifiable information, were stored securely within Google Drive. Their only other location was NVivo for the purposes of analysis.

*Informed Consent*

The principle of informed consent was upheld with utmost transparency. For interviewees, comprehensive consent forms were administered, detailing the study's objectives, the voluntary nature of participation, and the participants' authority to withdraw at any juncture. To ensure the confidentiality of interviewees, their identities have been covered by pseudonyms, preserving their privacy and fostering open dialogue. For city-wide data sets, these data sets are anonymized and free to be used by the public, so consent was not a concern.

For ethnographic and participant observations, it was not announced that I was making observations in order to preserve the nature of the events that I was observing. However, each of the meetings that I attended and have included in this research were open to the public and could have been attended by anyone, thus this consent was not necessary. During these meetings I limited my participation to observation of the meeting, taking written notes as the meeting progressed of content pertinent to themes of trust, ownership, and processes related to shaping the physical aspects of the residents' community. The same level of protections on identity that I granted to my interviewees were granted to all those I observed during these data collection methods.

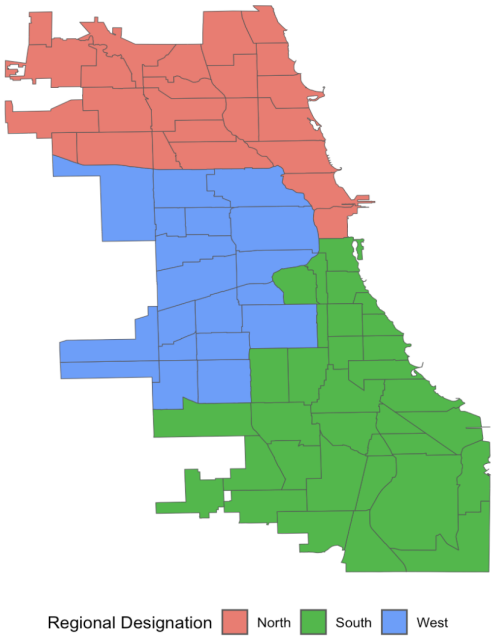
*Reflexivity*

I am aware of the ways in which my background and life experiences may influence the ways in which I interact with and interpret the data within my study. As a biracial woman of both Black and White descent, I am more cognizant of the racial implications between these two races than I may be toward other racial interactions. Despite the time that I spent living in Chicago during my data collection, having grown up within the suburbs of East Kansas, I am more familiar with social interactions in that setting than I am of those within a huge city like Chicago. My role as an outsider to this city created both new opportunities for me to see trends that others may have overlooked as well as challenges to connecting with residents within the area, especially those on the South and West sides of Chicago. Sociology as a field, and particularly at Harvard where I have been trained in that field, seems to me often oriented toward the idea of "justice," defined by each researcher within their own moral framework. Within my own experience in this discipline, I have come to see most phenomena as a convergence of historical impact, individual agency, and communal culture. It is important to acknowledge how all of these elements form the lens through which I see and move through the world and may influence my analysis of the data.

# FINDINGS CHAPTER 1: DEMOGRAPHIC CONSIDERATIONS

In order to understand how ownership and trust influence participation in shaping the neighborhoods of Chicago, it is first imperative to examine the ways in which other factors shape the landscape in which ownership and trust are formed. In the introduction, the history of the city of Chicago was discussed, but using city-wide data sources it is possible to view a snapshot of Chicago over the past few years to examine the impacts of race, hardship, age, and community divisions on Trust and Ownership that will be discussed in the next two chapters. This chapter aims to answer: how do demographic characteristics, socio-economic conditions, and geographic boundaries influence patterns of trust and ownership? Notable patterns are identified, and alternate demographic-based hypotheses are dismissed. First, I will explain my decided divisions of the city of Chicago. Next, I will examine how race and hardship are each distributed across these regions. I will follow this with a brief examination of age's impact on trust and DIY engagement. Lastly, I reflect on the city's ward divisions and racial hegemony within each community area, to examine if the data suggests they have any bearing on my results.

Figure 1: Regional Division




## REGIONS

Chicago community areas are often described as being North, West, or South within the city. These regional boundaries are flexible and while there are some common lines of demarcation, these lines can change from map

to map, depending on who has created it. For the purposes of this study, I have chosen to designate the regions as shown in Figure 1.[6]

These regional categorizations are in line with commonly held understanding among residents (Chicago Studies 2020), with a couple of exceptions. The community areas of West Englewood and Englewood are sometimes categorized as West rather than South side neighborhoods. However, their racial composition more closely aligns with the Southern neighborhoods, and so I have included them in the South region instead. The Near North Side, Loop, and Near South Side neighborhoods are often placed by residents into a separate regional category called "Central." I chose to instead divide these into the larger regional categories because it is more useful to view them within the context of the larger regional areas for observation of region patterns along race, Hardship, trust, etc. Over the course of the next few findings sections, I will be referring to regional patterns based on these demarcations, and the ways in which these regional patterns may influence involvement or the development of ownership or trust.

[6] The North side includes 24 community areas: Lake View, Lincoln Park, Near North Side, Edgewater, Uptown, North Center, Lincoln Square, Rogers Park, Albany Park, Irving Park, Avondale, Logan Square, Portage Park, Jefferson Park, Loop, Belmont Cragin, Dunning, West Ridge, North Park, Forest Glen, Edison Park, Norwood Park, Montclare, and Hermosa.

The West side includes 20 community areas: Austin, West Garfield Park, East Garfield Park, Near West Side, North Lawndale, South Lawndale, Humboldt Park, West Town, Garfield Ridge, Clearing, Archer Heights, West Elsdon, Chicago Lawn, Gage Park, West Lawn, Lower West Side, Humboldt Park, Mckinley Park, New City, and Brighton Park.

The South side includes 34 community areas: Armour Square, Bridgeport, Douglas, Englewood, Fuller Park, Grand Boulevard, Greater Grand Crossing, Hyde Park, Kenwood, Oak Lawn, South Shore, Washington Park, Woodlawn, Near South Side, West Englewood, Ashburn, Auburn Gresham, Beverly, Morgan Park, Mount Greenwood, Washington Heights, Avalon Park, Burnside, Calumet Heights, Chatham, East Side, Hegewisch, Pullman, Riverdale, Roseland, South Chicago, South Deering, West Pullman, and Oakland.

## RACE AND HARDSHIP

### *Race Across the City*

One of the primary things to note about Chicago's landscape is the persistently high level of racial segregation present in the city. Using the "Community Data Snapshots 2023" data collected and hosted by the Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning and most recently updated July 11th, 2023, it's possible to visualize this segregation across the city. In Figures 2.1-2.4, I have mapped out the percentage of each race within the various community areas. In Figure 2.1, the Black population is concentrated in the South and West of the city, while Figure 2.3 shows a heavy Hispanic population between these heavily Black areas. On the North side, however, there is a large White population as shown in Figure 2.2. The Asian population is more lightly distributed throughout the North side of the city, with the heaviest concentration in Armour Square, in the Near South Side (Figure 2.4).

Figure 2: Racial Breakdown Across the City

Figure 2.1: Percentage of Black Population

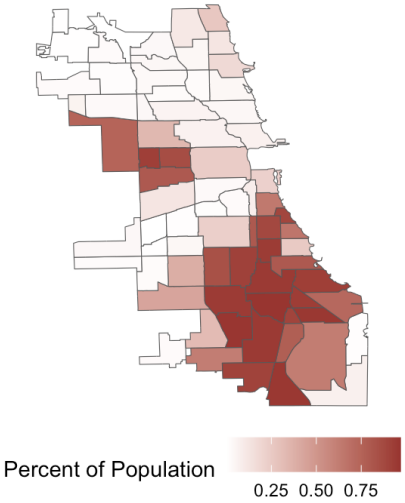



Figure 2.2: Percentage of White Population

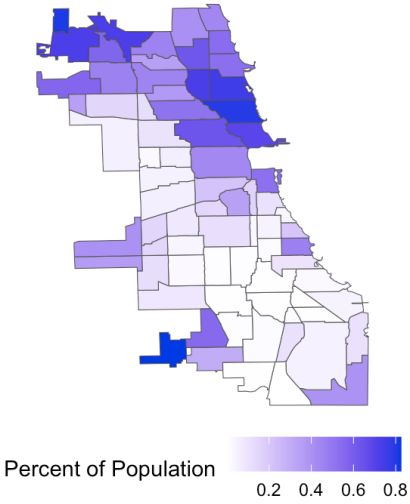



Figure 2.3: Percentage of Hispanic Population

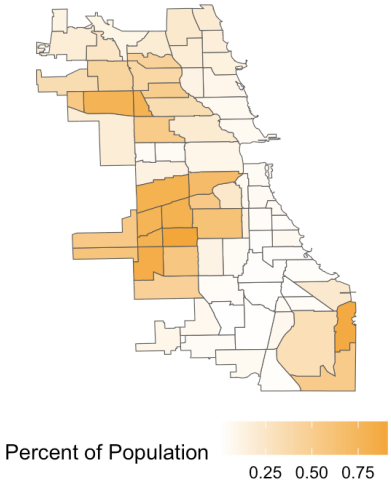
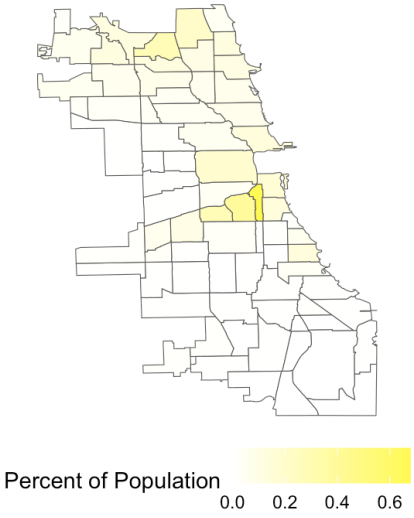



Figure 2.4: Percentage of Asian Population



*Hardship Across the City*

Considerations of race further come into play, when we examine how hardship is distributed across the city. This can be visualized through the Hardship Index from data in the Chicago Health Atlas. On their website, The Hardship Index is described as "a composite score reflecting hardship in the community (higher values indicate greater hardship)" originally created by the Brookings Institute in 1906 (Chicago Health Atlas). This measure considers the following factors: "unemployment, age dependency, education, per capita income, crowded housing, and poverty" (ibid). By standardizing all of these factors into a single score ranging from 0-100, comparison between geographies is possible. Figure 3 demonstrates how the Hardship Index manifests itself across the city of Chicago, with the worst scores concentrated on the South and West sides in red while the best scores are concentrated on the North side in green. Figures 2.1-2.4indicate the people who are concentrated in these areas, but to make the correlation clearer, it can be demonstrated graphically—particularly the correlation between the concentration of Black people in a neighborhood and Hardship versus the concentration of Hispanic people in a neighborhood and Hardship.

Figure 3: Hardship Index Across the City

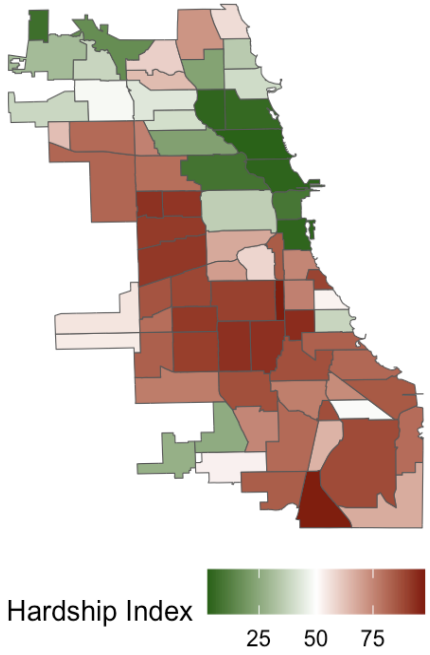


Figure 4: Black Population Percentage vs. Hardship

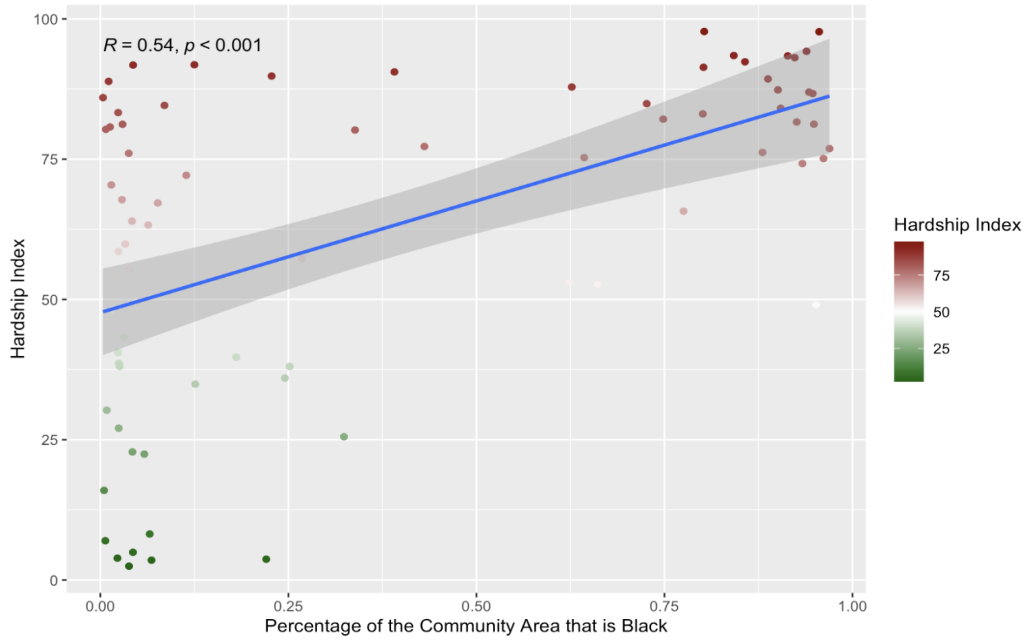
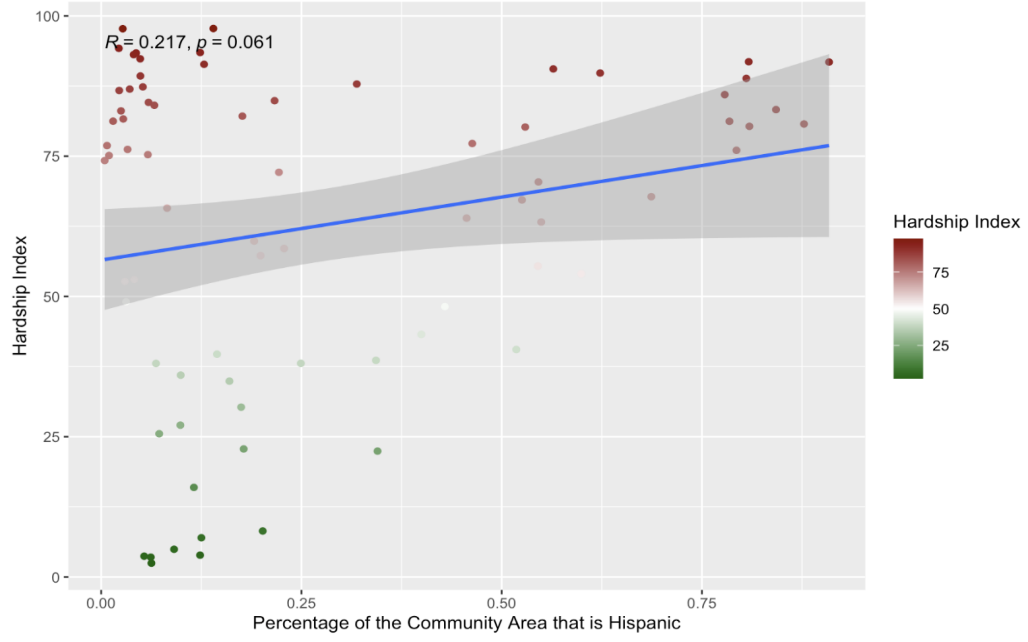
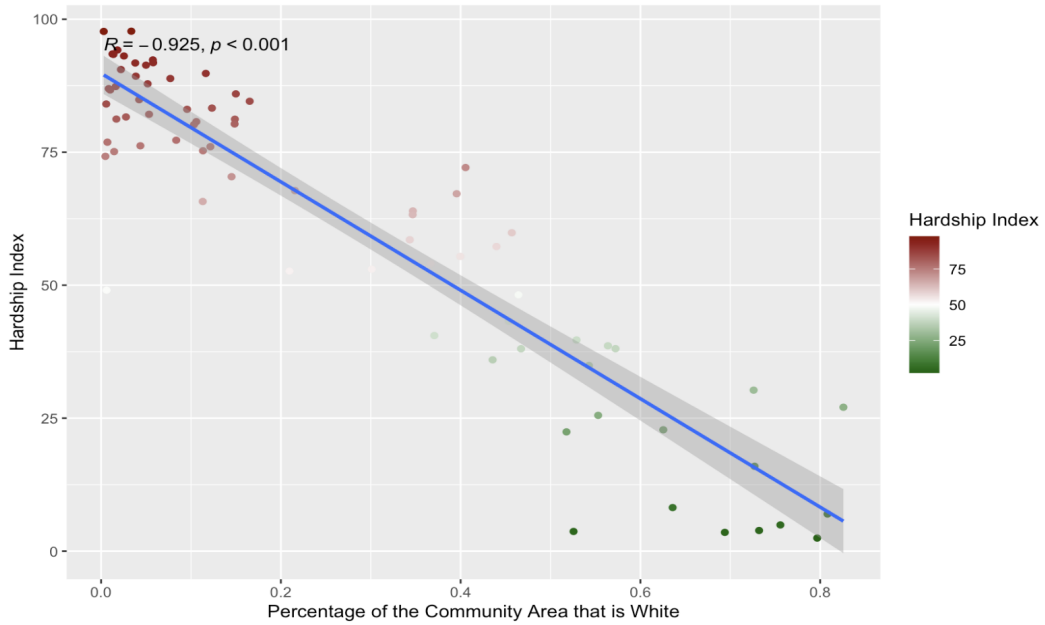



Figure 5: Hispanic Population Percentage vs. Hardship



Both Figures 4 and 5 display a positive correlation between the concentration of Black/Hispanic people in a neighborhood and the levels of hardship that it experiences, with there being slightly more compelling case for the correlation between Black concentration and Hardship ($R = 0.54$, $p < 0.001$) versus Hispanic concentration and Hardship ($R = 0.217$, $p = 0.061$). The correlation between Black concentration and Hardship is statistically significant, while the correlation between Hispanic concentration and Hardship falls below the threshold for significance. What is even more shocking is the extremely high negative correlation between White concentration and Hardship (Figure 6). Beyond mere statistical significance, there is almost a direct negative correlation between White concentration and Hardship ($R = -0.925$, $p < 0.001$) While the degree to which Hardship exists primarily within Black and Hispanic

Figure 6: White Population Percentage vs. Hardship




communities of Chicago may be understood, one thing is clear: Hardship is certainly not present where large concentrations of White people are. This analysis reveals that race is an important indicator as it relates to the levels of hardship one might experience within their Chicago community, particularly for those that live in community areas that maintain a racial majority.

**AGE**

In examining the relationship between retirement age populations within community areas and trust/engagement (based on the literature's indication of the link between these factors), I was able to examine how the prevalence of people of a certain age might influence the behaviors and thoughts of the whole community area. Because the literature suggests that there may be differences in trust of the city that are influenced by age category, I wanted to see if a higher prevalence of older individuals within a community might increase the overall trust within that community area or the amount of independent engagement (ex: picking up trash). First, in Figure 7, using the same "Community Data Snapshots 2023" data, I measure the association between the percentage of people over the age of 65 (from within each community area) and the level of trust in that community area from the Chicago Health Atlas (2021-2022). There is a slight correlation between them, but it is not statistically significant, suggesting that there may be some truth to the notion that older folks have a higher degree of trust in the local government, but more research would be needed to understand this aspect of engagement.

Figure 7: Percent Over 65 vs. Local Government Trust

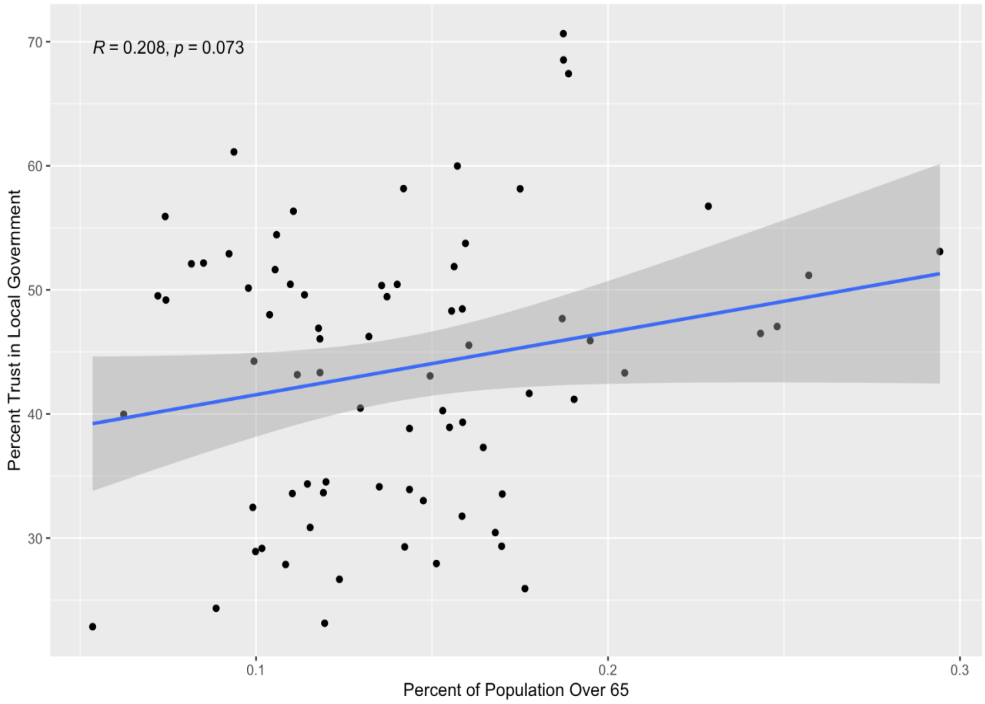
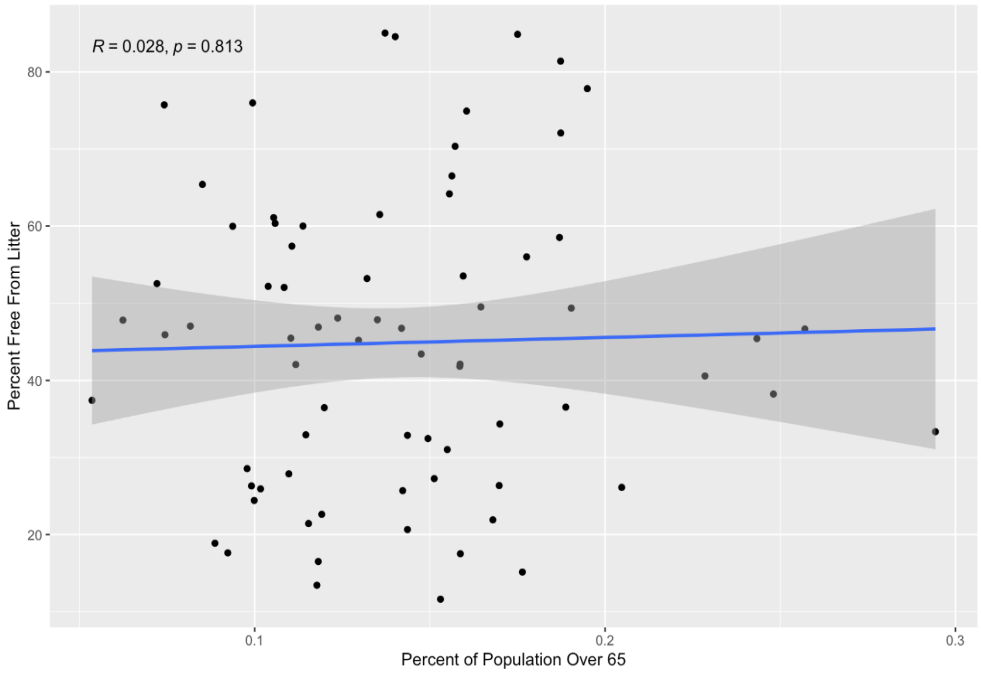



Figure 8: Percent Over 65 vs. Cleanliness



I also examined, in Figure 8, the relationship between the percentage of people over age 65 in a community area and the percentage of people who described their neighborhood as without litter (also taken from the Chicago Health Atlas 2021-2022). There was almost no correlation between these variables, suggesting that when it comes to DIY initiatives such as picking up litter, these are not initiatives coming only from those who are of retirement age.

## COMMUNITY DIVISIONS

*Wards vs. Community Areas*

Another point of interest within the city of Chicago is the role of the community area versus the ward. Chicago has 77 community areas and 50 legislative wards, and the lines that separate these are not the same. Legislative wards are drawn and redrawn by the city government with fluctuations in population and demographic changes while community area boundaries have remained consistent since the 1920s (Chicago Studies), which means that many community areas fall within multiple wards, and most wards contain more than one community area. This is related to Jane Jacobs's (1961) theories about potential challenges to make change at the district level (in this case the ward) when there are conflicting interests at the street neighborhood level (in this case, the community areas). To examine this

Table 2: Ward Divisions Within Communiy Areas

| Number of Wards | Number of Community Areas |
|---|---|
| 1 | 4 |
| 2 | 10 |
| 3 | 16 |
| 4 | 23 |
| 5 | 12 |
| 6 | 7 |
| 7 | 4 |
| 8 | 1 |
| NA | 1 |

potential phenomenon in Chicago, I counted how many wards each community area was divided into, with the results displayed in Table 2. These results show that there are only 4 community areas in Chicago that are entirely within one ward, with the most common degree of division for community areas being 4 wards. Over 60% of community areas (47) are divided into 4-8 wards. These divisions fall across the city without any notable geographical patterns (Figure 9). To examine whether these division differences played a major role in trust or ownership, I compared the degree of divisions that a community experienced to the trust in the local government that the community area expressed. The results for this are shown in Figure 10. Across division degrees there is no clear correlation between the number of divisions a community area experiences from ward divisions and the trust in the local government.

To examine if there is any potential relationship between sense of ownership and the degree of divisions in a community area, I compare the division degree of each community area with the litter rates. Once again, there is no clear correlation between the degree of divisions a community area experiences and the level of cleanliness (Figure 11). In effect, there are no major differences in ownership and trust between community areas based on the amount of ward divisions. This

Figure 9: Distribution of Ward Divisions

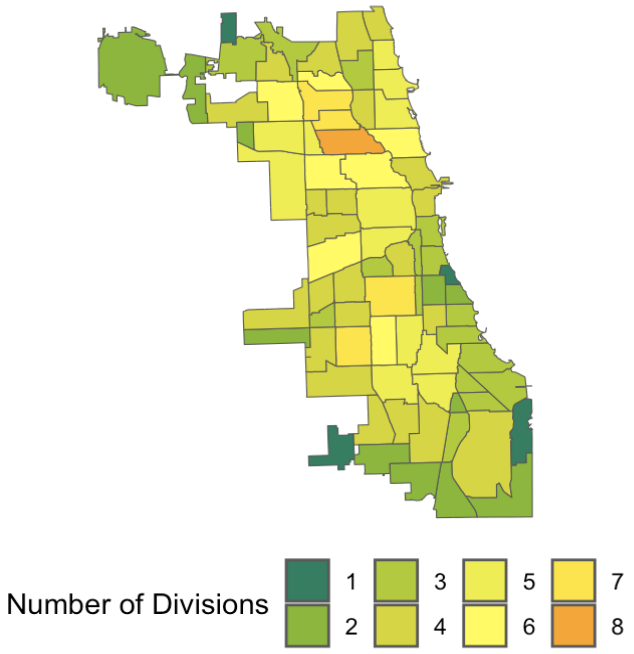


Figure 10: Local Goverment Trust by Community Divisions

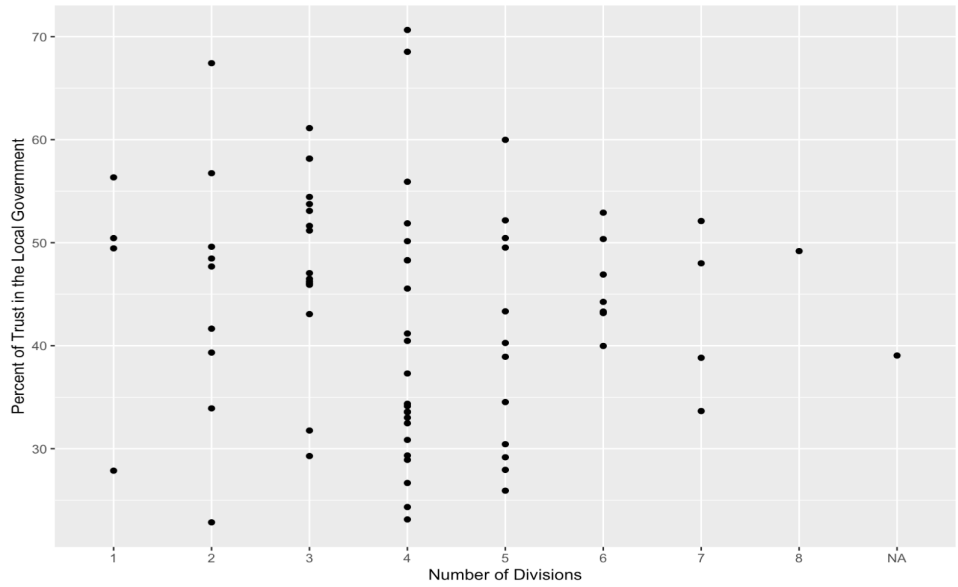
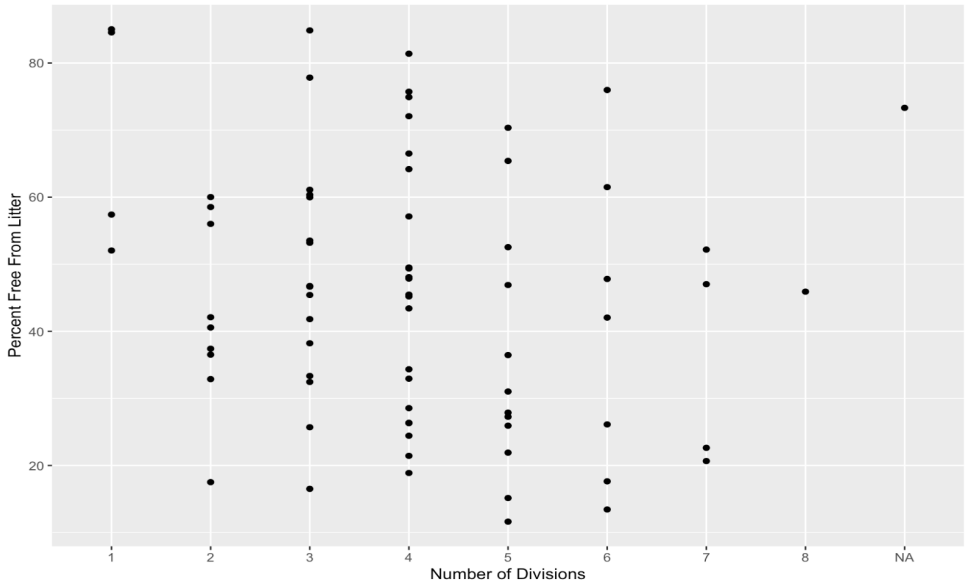



Figure 11: Litter Rates by Community Divisions




suggests that the challenges that Jacobs (1961) suggests regarding competing interests at intersections within the various community levels within a city are not significantly associated with trust or sense of ownership.

*Racial Hegemony*

Based on the racial and ethnic enclaves that form in the various regions of the City of Chicago, I hypothesized that there might be some noticeable differences in trust or social cohesion between communities that have a high degree of racial hegemony, or where there is clear racial majority, and those that do not. In order to measure this, I examined the Chicago Population Counts data set from the City of Chicago Data portal. This data set combines metrics from the Census Bureau, American Community Survey, and other city-wide sources. For each community area, I calculated the Percentage Black, Hispanic, Asian, and White. I then categorized each community that had greater than or equal to 52% of one race as being composed of the majority that race. The total counts can be seen in Table 3 below.

Calculating the average trust in local government across all community areas yielded a

Table 3: The Impact of Racial Hegemony

| Dominant Racial Group (>%52) | Community Areas | Sense of Community Belonging (%) | Trust in Local Government (%) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Asian | 1 | 52.84032 | 47.04484 |
| Black | 28 | 42.62081 | 38.96647 |
| Hispanic | 18 | 41.26620 | 41.00187 |
| None | 12 | 44.73872 | 47.44401 |
| White | 16 | 50.50195 | 51.45453 |

result of 43.58% people across community areas saying they trust the local government. On average, across all community areas, 44.45% of people say they feel like they belong. As shown in Table 3, the levels of trust in community areas with a dominant racial group were not better compared to the trust levels in community areas with no dominant racial group (labeled “None” and yielding 47.44% trust on average). Trust in the Asian and White neighborhoods was higher than average while in the Black and Hispanic neighborhoods it was less than average. These results lead me to believe that it is not the nature of racial hegemony that is impacting levels of

trust. In fact, the lower levels of trust in primarily Black and Hispanic areas and higher levels in primarily White areas reflect the correlations found with Hardship, which I will examine further in the Trust chapter. Looking at the sense of community belonging reported in these community areas, it is again slightly higher than average in community areas with no racial hegemony, higher than average in White and Asian communities, and below average in Black and Hispanic communities. While there are differences between racial groups, there is no distinct difference between neighborhoods where there is a clear dominant racial group and neighborhoods without.

**SUMMARY**

In this chapter, I examined demographic features that could potentially shape trust and ownership narratives of my interviewees. First, I explained my division of the city of Chicago's community areas into North, West, and South categories. I then detailed the racial segregation across these community areas and distribution of Hardship across the city. Looking at how Hardship varied with respect to racial concentrations, it was made clear that Black and Hispanic communities are more likely to experience a higher degree of hardship, while there is almost a perfect inverse relationship between the percentage of a community that is white versus the degree of hardship present there. Age, another demographic factor that may have played into differences across community areas, I examined as a variable that might impact the degree of trust in local government (through increased formal engagement) or the amount of litter on the sidewalks (through increased informal engagement). The degree of correlation for both of these variables was too low to be considered significant. Finally, I examined the possible inner-community area divisions that might cause a difference in trust levels. Wards, formal divisions of the city, don't align with the community area divisions and cut up community areas. Comparing

the data for each community area, there was no correlation between the number of ward divisions a community area experienced and its degree of trust in the local government or cleanliness. The same was trust for racial divisions, with racial hegemony not being correlated with any stronger trust or belonging among residents.

Now that we have explored possible demographic explanations, we can dive into the lived experience of residents from across the city. In the next chapter, I will begin to look at ownership; how residents understand this concept, how it varies among them, and possible contributing/deterring factors to fostering ownership.

## FINDINGS CHAPTER 2: OWNERSHIP

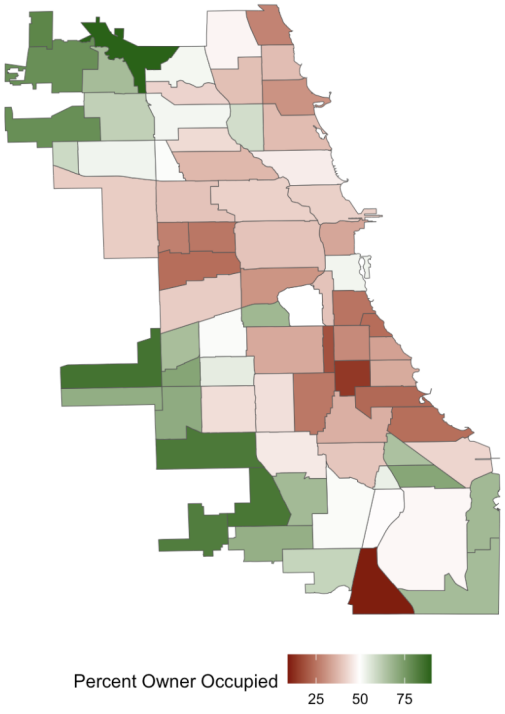
This thesis seeks to explore how residents' sense of ownership and trust work through various social mechanisms to influence the ways in which they engage in shaping the physical elements of their communities within the city of Chicago. This chapter answers the following questions: how is sense of ownership understood by residents and planners? How does that understanding then influence the ways in which people engage with this shaping? In the following sections, I explore the ways in which Chicago residents define their sense of ownership and how that sense influences their perceptions of and participation in shaping their communities through analysis of 1-on-1 interviews I conducted, community meetings I sat in on, and quantitative data collected by the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH), the Chicago Park District (CPD), and the American Community Survey (ACS). I start by explaining the elements interview respondents mentioned that comprise their sense of ownership over their community. I then clarify this with the perception of residents who work as planners on the extent to which they feel that they have ownership over the communities they work in. It is often a cultural norm to think about ownership in terms of property, and therefore seek to further distinguish between residents' ideas about the demonstration of ownership in both the public and the private spheres. I then explore how people perceive participation differences between renters and owners in caring for the physical aspects of the neighborhood, as well as potential motivations underlying these differences. Finally, I explore how applications of these ideas arise in tangible forms of community-engagement throughout the city, particularly through vacant lots and the Large Lots Program/ChiBlockBuilder, DIY action, and unorganized graffiti vs. organized community art.

## RESIDENTS ON OWNERSHIP

First, it is necessary to better define what is meant by "sense of ownership," a task I approach by investigating: what does sense of ownership mean to residents in Chicago? In each of my interviews, I typically began by asking what it meant to my participants to feel like they had a "sense of ownership" over their neighborhood. Two key themes emerged, as participants commonly brought up the following: investment, whether fiscal or temporal, and change-making abilities, whether direct or indirect.

### *Investment*

Figure 12: Percent of Housing Units Occupied by the Owners




A few interviewees immediately thought about their homes when asked about what it meant to have a "sense of ownership" over their neighborhood. "I'm a homeowner, so that automatically gives me some ownership," said Jane[7], a homeowner living on the North side of Chicago. According to the 2023 State of Rental Housing in the city of Chicago produced by the Institute for Housing Studies at DuPaul University, about "54.2 percent of Chicago households rented in 2021," a figure in line with the fairly consistent rental

[7] Interviewees have been assigned pseudonyms to protect their identities and privacy. These pseudonyms are consistent across all thesis chapters.

rates between 54-58 percent that have persisted since 2012 (DuPaul 2023). Examining the 2020 data from the American Community Survey (ACS) on the percentage of owner-occupied housing units in Figure 12 reveals that the concentration of this phenomenon doesn't follow any distinct clustering in the North, West, or South; it is something characteristic across the city[8]. It is likely why even the residents who mentioned ownership over their home as a factor in their sense of ownership over the city qualified it with at least one other reason that also contributed to this sense. Jane continued explaining to me that it wasn't just her financial investment that gave her a sense of ownership, but also the time that she had spent in the neighborhood: "I think we've been on our street longer than most people."

Chloe, a homeowner on the South side of Chicago synthesized these ideas in her response. "When you own a home or own a condo, you feel more rooted, because you're making a substantial financial investment to stay in one place," she said. "We have young children. That also creates a closer sense of community because the other parents are the parents in your children's school or in your children's sports. And so that also adds to the sense of community." Chloe's response demonstrates a perceived connection between the ties a financial investment imposes, incentivizing a person to remain rooted in that place (temporal investment) and resulting in more social connections developing over time. Henry, a North side resident, answered with a similar sentiment, and explained that his sense of ownership comes from the friendships that he has made in the neighborhood during the duration of his time living in the area. "After living in the neighborhood for 20 years, I feel like whenever I leave my house, I see familiar faces. I do think that one of the reasons that we love this neighborhood is because we've lived here for so long… I think that having a sense of local community is a large part of feeling

[8] There is a radial pattern that exists, but this doesn't align with the patterns related to hardship or racial segregation noted in the previous chapter on demographic considerations.

ownership over your neighborhoods." I distinguish between social cohesion and the temporal element that contribute to residents' sense of ownership because, while they are largely interlinked as is clear in the quote from Henry above, there are slight distinctions. While community ties often arise from temporal investment, they do not inherently contain the power to make change. I therefore refer to these ties as a form of social cohesion and will elaborate further on this concept in the next section.

Charlotte, another resident on the North side of Chicago, explained a similar phenomenon that arose from her time spent in her neighborhood. "For me, it's important to know the neighbors or the businesses in my neighborhood. The more people I know, the more ownership I feel over the place in which I live." she said. Temporal investment results in social cohesion that functions like glue for these residents, keeping them embedded in the community and a perpetual cycle of temporal investment. "I really feel a connection to this block," said Rebecca, an older woman also from Chicago's North side, "When [my husband and I] think about it, I mean, we're not young. When we think about moving somewhere, it's like, no, I don't want to leave my block. It's that sense of 'I know people here.' When I release monarch butterflies all the kids come and there is a real sense of community here. That's a nice thing to have." Essentially, Rebecca is explaining that her temporal investment incentivizes her to stay in this area in particular, which drives the actions that contribute to a sense of ownership.

*Change Making Abilities*

Most often residents described their sense of ownership in terms of their ability to make change within their neighborhood. These descriptions tended to fall into one of two categories, either direct (i.e., picking up trash or planting a garden,) or indirect (i.e., speaking to an

alderman) influence. Those who spoke of direct influence referred to their abilities to enact their own changes on to the fabric of their neighborhood.

These depictions of change-making were often embedded within stories that also featured depictions of strong social networks, linking this element of ownership to the above section on temporal investment. Alex, a resident from the North side described to me what this was like for him, explaining, “Working with the people in the community about getting things done if we need improvements, complaining if things aren't going right, and the biggest thing is really getting a response back from our elected officials on things.” Olivia, a resident on the North side, said that her “strong social network” impacted her sense of ownership by enhancing her “ability to know what's going on and be able to influence what's going on to a certain degree.” Ultimately, the influence of this social cohesion with regard to ownership is tied to how it influences one’s ability to make change.

There is also the conception of being able to make change as an individual. A North side resident and planner, William spoke about the important role of action during our interview. “It’s…feeling that you would have an ability to affect change from the plants and paving to making sure that all of the municipal streets are being plowed and bike routes are there, and garbage is picked up, to even advocating for larger improvements to neighborhood schools or anything like that.” The last point he made is where the role residents play shifts from direct participation to indirect. This is important because it demonstrates that residents do not have to make the change themselves to feel that they are being effective; advocacy that results in someone else taking the necessary actions is enough.

Residents who emphasized indirect participation wanted to be consulted when the city wanted to make changes and categorized that into their sense of ownership. Some residents like Rebecca, however, needed to see that consultation yield some result. She explained:

> "I need to feel like when I say something, it gets heard. When I make a contribution, working on the street clean up or talking to the aldermen or speaking up at a community meeting about zoning, or anything that affects the neighborhood, I need to feel like I'm being heard or that somebody doesn't say, 'Oh, that's a stupid idea' or 'Why would you?' They at least write it down. And then I want to get some kind of feedback about it or see the result. When I join the neighborhood clean-up and I take a street, I look back and it's pretty clean. And then I walk around to the other areas that other people did. And it looks clean, and it's really nice…seeing results and feeling heard, I think are the two things that are measures of success for me."

For Rebecca, the ability to see her words make a difference, even in as little as prompting the planner to pull out a notepad and write it down, had a similar effect to seeing something direct happen, like a clean block after her work picking up the trash.

"I think ownership is just being included," said Mia, a resident from the South side, "There's so many levels of politicians…and so I think ownership would just be allowing residents the opportunity to sit at the table and be informed." More on the role that understanding of the city plays in neighborhood participation will be discussed in the next chapter on Trust.

In conclusion, residents think about their sense of ownership in two intertwined ways: investment and change making abilities. Financial investment is defined by the amount of money one has committed to a property (such as buying it), while temporal investment relates to social cohesion and residents' ability to enact change. It should be clarified that there can be a difference between residents' perceived abilities to make change and their actual power to do so. They are related in that perceived ability stems from witnessing the fruits of advocacy and engagement. While this perceived ability to make changes, directly or indirectly, seems to have a

large part in influencing what people would call “ownership” over their neighborhood, it does not alone define ownership. This becomes more apparent when asking residents who work as planners whether they feel a sense of ownership over the communities they work in—communities where they have a large degree of influence in what happens but do not live.

## PLANNERS ON OWNERSHIP

In addition to asking what residents thought about ownership, I wanted to know: how do planners categorize their role within the communities they work in terms of the presence or absence of ownership? How can that inform how we define ownership? Getting a more in-depth perspective with this subsection of the population in particular is uniquely interesting to this research topic. Their increased knowledge about the field of urban planning and care for the physical nature of the community (as evidenced by their choice or work) allows them to provide insights that are potentially more informed than the average Chicago resident. When I sat down with the subsection of Chicago residents who were also planners, I asked them whether or not they viewed themselves as having a sense of ownership over the communities that they worked in. Some of them agreed, while most others sought out a different word to describe the relationship, confirming that ownership is more complex than simply the ability to make or influence change, requiring an interplay with the other factors like financial/temporal investment and social cohesion.

### *Planning is Ownership*

Planners who agreed that planning is ownership, like Charlotte, explained that as a planner, “you're physically in charge of and seeing change in the public realm. And so that

creates a sense of ownership. Like, 'Oh, that's my planter over there.'" She further explained that it was a matter of caring for the quality of work done in the area. "It's got to look good. I want it to be nice for the neighborhood," she said. "When you're walking up and down the street, you know all the people there, and being in charge of the public way really makes a difference in terms of the ownership that you feel as a staff person." Another planner, Abigail, agreed when I asked her about her sense of ownership over the communities she worked in. "Absolutely," she said. "I think, as a planner, our role, in particular, with today's much more modern and appropriate approaches is bringing comparison, whether that's programs, images, infrastructure, just identifying how other communities engage these processes, understanding the policies behind them, policies that could change them."

Between these two responses, it is interesting to note that while both planners agree that ownership is the right word to ascribe to the role of their profession, they don't wholly embrace the definition of ownership put forth by residents. While Charlotte does emphasize her change-making abilities as part of the ownership she experiences, she also emphasizes a performative aspect; she wants to make the neighborhood look good for the community (as opposed to herself). Similarly, Abigail, rather than relating to investment or change-making, frames the ownership she has over the communities in which she works in terms of her responsibilities to that community, an observation similar to planners who denied that ownership was the appropriate word to ascribe to their profession.

*Planning is Not Ownership*

Other planners I spoke with disagreed that ownership was the right word to describe it. I pressed them further, asking what word would better explain their relationship with the

communities in which they work, and they responded with words they felt more appropriately reflected their simultaneous interest in and distance to the community. William said that ownership was too strong of a word, but there was definitely a sense of investment:

> "I mean, I think you feel a sense of pride or definitely an involvement. You gain an understanding of the community and kind of where they're at and where they're coming from and what their wants are. I think you have to know that if you want to help them get to that spot. I wouldn't say ownership per se, because that feels like that's theirs, but definitely an investment in them and the project being successful. You take pride in, hopefully, bettering people's lives."

This is important because "investment" was a concept many residents linked strongly to the construction of their ownership. From this simultaneous overlap and distinction, we learn that investment is understood by residents and planners as devoting time and/or resources to an area, though for residents the resources are their own and the outcome is self-serving while for planners the resources are the city, and the outcomes are for the community.

Sarah, a planner living on the West side, also thought that investment was a better word. She added that responsibility, or accountability would also be a more appropriate way to describe the relationship. "When I think of ownership, I think of decision making," Sarah said, "and I don't feel like I need to be the decision maker in every community that I work in…They're hiring me because of my expertise, but I don't need to tell people what to do. I'm there to learn and to help build capacity and share what I know with others so that they can become more self-sufficient, and then they can have ownership over their communities."

Leo, a planner from the South side, agreed that ownership wasn't quite the right word for it:

> "I've always sort of felt privileged in that I can be in that space, even though I don't have a vested stake in it from a personal standpoint. And that's one of the things I really like about this job is that you know, I'm able to, in a sense, be part of the community. I do feel like doing some of the work we do here allows us to

> participate in community, even though it's not a place that I typically live or may frequent very often. And that goes for any part of the city that we've worked in. So, it's just interesting that you can work in those spaces, but not have any kind of ownership stake in there. For someone in a private sector, not in the planning area, you don't really get that kind of experience, because it's more transactional."

In conclusion, while a few planners would identify their relationship with the community they work in as one of ownership, most reject the term "ownership" to describe what they deem to be their role as a key decision maker or facilitator of change. They distinguish ownership and what they have with words that they feel more appropriately encompass their relationship, primarily investment, but also responsibility, accountability, and participation. Even among planners who do accept "ownership" as a term appropriate for their profession, these concepts also dominate their descriptions of what that means in a planning context. These insights reflect that, while change making abilities are significant to the formation of a sense of ownership among residents, they are not the only things that contribute to our understanding of and embodiment of this term. Planners view their investment as a way of contributing to a community that they are not a part of, and thus do not own despite the time and resources they dedicate to the area. This reinforces the notion that belonging to an area, which is tied heavily to temporal investment, is also crucial in cultivating the sense of ownership residents feel.

## IDEAS OF PROPERTY

The community in which one may or may not feel a sense of ownership consists of both individual property and communal property. How does a sense of ownership around each of these types of property manifest in residents' shaping of these spheres? And how do residents interpret the ownership expressed by others in these contexts?

*Individual Property*

Josh, a highly educated Black man living on the South side of Chicago in a home he owns within an area that he classified as having a lot of homeowners, explained personal ownership in terms of private property—particularly, the yard around the single-family home or condo. “I've never lived anywhere where so many damn people mow their lawns. It's crazy. It's non-stop lawn mowing. That's ownership.” said Josh, “In my experience, it wasn't easy to get the property. So, it's not surprising that once people do have it that they try to take care of it. It's more surprising to me when people that own property just let it go, let it depreciate, and don't take care of it to the point that they're losing value.” We’ll return to Josh’s story in the upcoming section on vacant land.

In a similar vein, when asked about the nature of the neighborhood in which she lived, Stacey, a resident on the North side, told a story about some friends she had that displayed the way she felt most neighbors reacted to the increase in neighborhood diversity:

> “We have these friends—two women who are married. And one was telling us that when they bought their house about 6 years ago, they wanted to have complete disclosure to their neighbors. So, she walked up to her neighbor, and she said, ‘Hi, I'd like to introduce myself. My wife and I are moving into the house, and we just want you to know where we're coming from.’ And he looks at her and he says, ‘Well, I don't care…do you mow your grass?’”

Not everyone was so concerned about the grass, however. “Owning property changes the way that I look at property. But it doesn't change the way that I feel about the neighborhood.” said Todd, “I was always amazed when people in the suburbs would gang up on people because their lawn wasn't mowed properly, or whatever. I think the idea that everybody has to take care of their property, because ‘I want to sell this someday and make a lot of money’ is annoying. That's why I like living in the city.” Together, these responses convey that individuals assess the

ownership of those they live around and express their own individual ownership through visual cues, particularly the maintenance of the front lawn.

*Communal Property*

Other residents described community ownership in terms of communal property. One Northern resident named Jerry (North) explained that "knowing your neighbors is what really gives you a stake in the neighborhood. It's not just yours. It's all your friends and neighbors who are there—you all have a stake. And you want to keep that neighborhood as nice as it is for however long you'll be here." This sentiment was expressed most often when referring to property that didn't have a clearly defined "owner" like a house or a lawn might, but instead to things like parks, rivers, and gardens that were enjoyed by the whole community, nonetheless. "I really feel like the park is sort of mine." Jane (North, homeowner) said. She suggested that it was this sentiment that prompted her to work on her "little garden tasks" at the park to participate in this shared ownership.

These responses prompted me to examine how opportunities to engage in communal ownership might vary in concentration across the city, as communal ownership was a concept primarily expressed by residents living on the North side. Given that several interviewees chose to speak unprompted about communal ownership in reference to parks, I chose to examine available park data to estimate the opportunities to participate in contributing to community ownership. Based on data from the Chicago Parks Department, I plotted maps showing the distribution of parks by number of parks (Figure 13) and by the amount of acreage (Figure 14). In Figure 13, it appears that there is a higher concentration of parks on the North than on the South or West sides. When looking at exact numbers, the South has 247 parks, while the North

has 240 and the West has 169. It would appear from mere totals that the South has more parks and thus more opportunities for this key expression of communal ownership, however it should be noted that the South has 10 more community areas within it than the North. Therefore, to better understand the park distribution, we should examine how the parks are distributed by the number of community areas within the region for a more accurate understanding of park availability.

Looking at the average number of parks per community area, the North takes the lead with 10, while the West comes in at 8.9 and the South averages 7.5.[9] The discrepancies are further visible when examining the maximum number of parks in a community within each of these regions. In the North the highest number of parks within a community area is 23; in the West that number is 20, while in the South that number is only 14. This suggests that community areas in the South and West have fewer parks, and these numbers are distributed more evenly across the region, while in the North there are more parks in a few community areas that elevate the figures for the entire region. Those patterns are visible in Figure 13. I further investigated the amount of land allocated to these parks in Figure 14, and found the acreage concentrated on the eastern border of the city. Because Chicago has an open lakefront across this border, which counts as a park, most of the acreage is concentrated along this side and these findings are less insightful to the distribution within the city.

Overall, however, these findings regarding the distribution of parks across community areas in Chicago along with residents' perceptions regarding the role participation in the care of these parks play in their enactment of ownership are significant. If communal ownership is formed in the context of communal property, then—while there are certainly other factors also at

[9] There is a standard deviation between these values in the North of 5.6, in the West of 6.1, and in the South of 3.8

play—it follows that communal ownership likely suffers when parks are less available, such as in the South region of Chicago.

Figure 13: Number of Parks in Each Community Area
Data Source: Chicago Park District

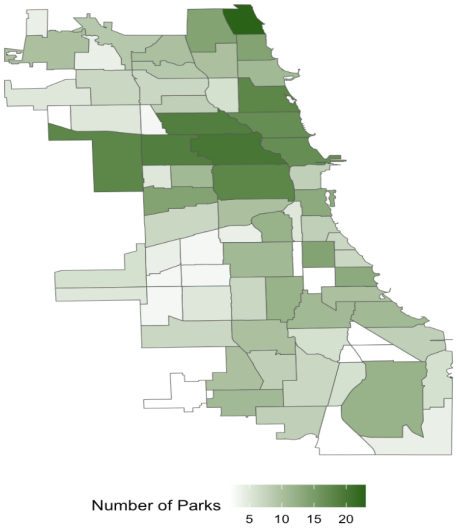
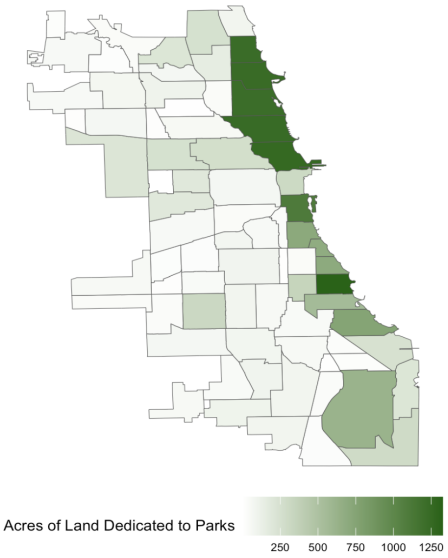



Figure 14: Amount of Land Dedicated to Parks in Each Community Area
Data Source: Chicago Park District




In conclusion, ownership over individual property is visualized primarily through the independent care of the lawn and home while people give examples of parks and rivers when discussing the ownership of communal property. The former is the private domain of one person, while the latter is understood to be the domain of everyone. Thus, care of independent property as well as communal property are understood to be ways of shaping the neighborhood and the visual attributes associated with this shaping—a nice lawn or a clean park—are positive indicators of ownership to others.

## RENTERS VERSUS OWNERS

Within a framework of ownership being something traditionally understood as financial, how do renters influence participation in shaping Chicago? This section addresses this sub question in three parts based on interviewee responses and community meeting observations:

owners' perceptions of renters, renters' self-perception, and reasons for the observed difference in participation.

*Owners' Perceptions of Renters*

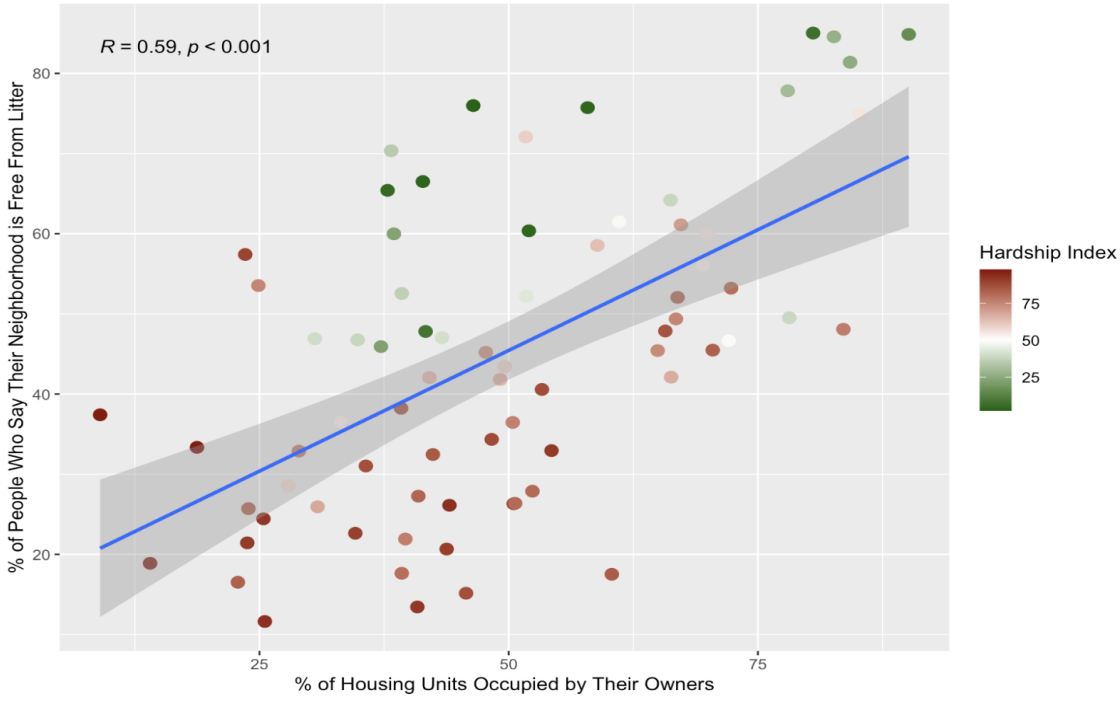
I walked into the library in South Chicago around 9:50 AM for the alderman-led meeting that was scheduled to start just a few minutes later. There were police officers standing at the front desk near the large metal detectors and sign-in desks stationed near the entrance of the small auditorium where the meeting was scheduled to be held. 10:00 AM came and went, and I heard someone behind me ask "What time does the meeting start?" The alderman came out onto the stage with a microphone, a polo, and jeans to say good morning to the crowd. "Good afternoon," someone shouted back, and the audience—now about 50-60 people large—laughed. The alderman smiled and apologized for the delay due to some technical difficulties they were addressing backstage and promised to start the session soon before disappearing again.

The meeting started a few minutes later, and a projector displayed a presentation on the stage. The alderman discussed different operations currently ongoing in the neighborhood such as clean-ups and the upcoming developments scheduled to take place. As they talked, people raised their hands with questions, many full of a clear passion for their neighborhood. One spoke about the visual culture of a store that seemed insulting, another lamented over the death of five neighbors who were shot in the park on Father's Day, and another man expressed his frustrations about the area near his house. "This used to be a beautiful little area," the man said, exasperated by all the efforts he had made to get the city to act on the trash and violence happening in that space, "I don't know what the heck happened. I mean…are they renters?"

This perception was not unique to the man at this community meeting. While some interview participants reported not noticing any differences in participation between owners and renters, throughout my interviews many residents seemed to perceive some difference in the way residents engaged based on their property ownership status. While the most obvious difference between renters and owners is their financial investment in the neighborhood, many of these observations seem to transcend the financial. Many residents didn't initially associate their financial ties as what gave them a sense of ownership, but rather their temporal investment, a feature that renters in these resident observations are assumed to lack. "The homeowners have a stake in the community, so they're more apt to do things rather than renters that come and go," said Alex (North). William expressed a similar observation, noting that while his current neighborhood didn't seem to have a clear distinction between renter and owner participation, in his former neighborhood which had more apartment buildings, things were different. "Everything is just a little bit more transitory. People aren't as invested in making those improvements. I feel like there's more litter around and it feels not…established," which sums up the ideas that most of the residents expressed in this distinction: lack of action regarding the cleanliness of a neighborhood is associated with renters, while taking action to keep the areas looking nice is associated with home ownership.

Across the city of Chicago, this pattern is also apparent in data collected by American Community Survey (ACS) and the Chicago Department of Health (CDH). Due to the common association among interviewees of renters and trash, I use CDH data on the percentage of people within a community area who said their neighborhood was generally free of litter as a metric for neighborhood care and clean-up. In Figure 15, I compare this figure in each community area with the reported percentage of housing units occupied by their owners (ACS) as a metric of renter versus homeowner presence. There is a significant correlation between home ownership and lack of litter. Another interesting phenomenon is that for communities with similar homeownership rates (most visible around the 37-62% ownership range), factors of Hardship[10] are correlated with higher or lower levels of litter—a lower Hardship score puts communities above the trend line (less litter) while a higher Hardship score puts communities below the trend line (more litter). In short, there is a

Figure 15: Ownership vs Litter




[10] The Hardship Index is described as "a composite score reflecting hardship in the community (higher values indicate greater hardship)" originally created by the Brookings Institute in 1906 (Chicago Health Atlas). Further details are in the Demographics chapter.

significant correlation between the lack of home ownership in a community and the presence of litter. This pattern reinforces stereotypes that homeowners make about renters not being as invested as they are in the care of the community. However, the further distinction in the presence of hardship on the presence of litter indicates that there may be more at play in the visual appeal of the neighborhood than just home ownership status.

*Renters' Self-Perceptions and Barriers*

I asked Ethan if, as a current renter, he was ever made to feel that he had less of a stake in the neighborhood. He said no but added that there is a clear perception that renters don't take ownership. He said, "We're in our buildings. Ideally, we want a nice-looking place, but owners are out there cleaning up their own building or anybody else's building. They sometimes say, 'You're a renter; why do you care about the neighborhood?'" Ethan's point highlights the unequal opportunities to demonstrate ownership between renters and homeowners. While homeowners have access to yards and private property as well as communal property in their area, renters can lack the ability to make changes on the private property. This connects back to the presence of parks in a community area; in areas where renters do not have access to communal property like parks, they are even further limited in ways they can express ownership over their community.

Others who were previously renters expressed similar thoughts. "Before I bought this house, I was a renter. And I was still very interested in what was happening in my neighborhood." argued Jerry, one of the homeowning residents I spoke to. "Sometimes people would say, well, you're just a renter, and I say well, it's still my neighborhood, and I'm still very interested in it." According to Jerry the difference in participation seemed to be less about

whether someone was a renter or owner and more to do with the time spent in the neighborhood. “I’m not saying renters aren’t involved,” he said, “some renters, or especially the corporate nomads who are traveling around and get moved every couple of years, don't have a stake in the neighborhood like I would having lived here so long.” This anecdote diverges from what might be expected based on the quantitative trend that shows a positive correlation between homeownership and neighborhood cleanliness. Rather than the renters being reluctant because of disinterest, these anecdotes present them as facing the barrier of social stigma and lacking the privilege of long-term stability needed for involvement.

Naomi, one of the community-engagement workers that I spoke with, also expressed that the perceived difference between renters and homeowners in engagement shouldn’t be taken at face value. Instead, as Ethan and Jerry point out, we should look at the barriers they face. “People would like to delineate between owners and renters and say that an owner has more of a voice than a renter. I just don't agree with that,” she said. “I think that it's manipulated to make renters perceive that they have less of a voice than an owner.” This societal source of the difference in the perceived right to engage echoes what the renters were saying. “I sometimes think that I don't have as much right, because I don't actually own property,” said Brenda. When I pressed her on what she felt caused her to feel this way about community-engagement she responded, “I think it's internal. Or maybe external. Maybe like, just like a cultural thing, like a society kind of thing.”

There are also concrete logistical challenges in reaching renters, Ruth explained to me:

> “As a community organizer, it's easier for me to access someone, even if they're a renter, in a single-family structure than in an apartment building because there's no access to their interior. So, I can't leave a flier. I can’t access their mailboxes. Everything is locked down. So those large apartment buildings, in my community, unless I know someone inside, I can't get my information to those people. So, I

> think that we lose a lot by the type of housing style that you live in. And that I think exacerbates that difference. I think they do care, but…we can't reach them.

Altogether, invested renters (as I would categorize the ones I spoke to), are aware of the stereotypes that homeowners make about renters, and may even agree with the sentiment at large. However, these invested renters also distinguish themselves from these stereotypes by the amount of time they have spent in the neighborhood and assert their right to involvement in changemaking despite their renter status. Both elements connect back to the two parts of the ownership definition established by residents at the start of this chapter (temporal investment and changemaking abilities). In addition to the stereotypes that may prevent renters who want to engage with the community from doing so, there are also logistical barriers to engagement that can make mobilizing them with traditional outreach methods difficult.

**ISSUES/INITIATIVES**

These concepts of ownership or lack thereof often manifest within the pain points and attempts at intervention the city makes. The ones I will address in the following section include vacant land and the subsequent Large Lots Program/ChiBlockBuilder; DIY action; and graffiti. These programs offer key insights into ownership because, while they vary in the amount of government involvement and support, they all rely on residents taking action. Through this section I explore sub-questions of my research topic such as: How does the concept of ownership previously established manifest itself in the way people understand the physical makeup of their neighborhood (the presence of vacant lots or graffiti)? How does the concept of ownership determine the actions they choose to take in influencing their environment (buying a vacant lot, DIY action, or calling in graffiti)?

*Vacant Land*

Communal property, when understood and cared for by the neighborhood is thought of as a space where everyone has ownership. On the other side of the spectrum—where no one has ownership—falls vacant land. During a meeting of the Housing and Neighborhoods Pillar for the We Will Chicago project, Ruth, a community organizer on the South side of Chicago, spoke passionately about the impact of the lack of property ownership in the South side neighborhoods. "A lot of our communities, one of the problems is that we don't own our communities," she said, speaking about the trash that piles up in vacant lots. "All ownership is someone that doesn't live there, doesn't engage there, they stay from afar. So, when the community starts falling apart, they don't care as long as the rents are still getting paid and the things that are bringing money to their pockets are done, but the community could be falling apart."

Not only can these vacant lots' existence deteriorate residents' sense of ownership, but they can actively rob it from them when projects are removed or ruined. Scott told me a story about one of the vacant properties that neighbors had commandeered to make a community garden, and their response once that garden was destroyed:

> "I think people around here are pretty informed about what's going on with those properties. Like the vacant lot that's just up the street used to be a community garden, but the person who owned the lot was going to try and sell it. The owner was kind of allowing whoever to use that while he wasn't using it, with the understanding that when he wanted to sell it, we were gonna have to vacate. And everybody was aware of that, but I would say we were all disappointed when it did get sold, and the community garden had to go away. And there's still nothing there. So, it's like, there was a source of community ownership with that community garden space, and now it's just empty."

The lots discussed were a mix of privately owned and city-owned lots. More discussion of the city's upkeep of vacant lots and the impact of their history will be discussed in the next chapter on Trust.

Those that didn't notice vacant lots in their own neighborhoods still had thoughts on the impact of the vacant lots on areas where they were prevalent. For example, Henry explained when I asked him about the presence of vacant lots in his neighborhood:

> "There are a few. It's still dense, though. It's not like places like the community in the South I volunteered for during the pandemic…That neighborhood is a very underserved neighborhood. It's predominantly black and there are very few services there. It's just a completely different world…As disadvantaged as this neighborhood is, though, there are people there who care and that are doing good things to kind of lift up the community. I felt like there was a sense of community that was happening down there. So, it wasn't blighted, but it's dehumanizing."

What Henry's comment displays is the ability of residents to recognize the prevalence of vacant lots as a sign of disinvestment, and the ability to distinguish between disinvestment from the local government and the engagement of individuals within the neighborhood.

Frequently, residents made comments that demonstrated a link in their perceptions between the absence of vacant land in their own neighborhoods and what that indicated about their neighborhood's value. "I mean the part of the area that I live in is expensive," Brenda said. "And so, land doesn't stay vacant long because someone can develop that and make a lot of money." A similar sentiment was expressed by Jerry. "No, it's pretty much occupied. The land is valuable here," he said, "It's a desirable neighborhood for all the transit and you've got other things here that attract people. So, there's not much in the way of empty land. It tends to get filled up." In both comments, residents took the absence of vacant land in their area as a signal for the value of their neighborhood.

In conclusion, the presence of vacant lots has a poor impact on community members' sense of ownership. The presence of vacant lots also seems to signal to residents that the neighborhood lacks financial value. To address these issues, the city of Chicago has launched several buyback programs to make the vacant lots more affordable and available to community residents, particularly those in the South and West sides of the city, such as the Large Lots Program or the more recent ChiBlockBuilder. These initiatives have their strengths but can also highlight problems of ownership within the experiences of those who go through the process. The process can cause frustration and make it seem like the city is purposefully seeking to limit resident ownership, and the lack of collaboration can lead residents to take matters into their own hands (i.e., DIY action).

*Large Lots Program*

At the end of May, I was seeking out people who had gone through the Large Lots Program, an initiative the city of Chicago started to sell vacant lots to nearby residents for one dollar—aka the Large Lots Program. During this search, I was introduced to Josh. We met over Zoom to discuss his views of his neighborhood and his experience with the Large Lots Program. His experiences shed a lot of light on the attitude within Chicago toward these programs and their influence on ownership in areas where the city is trying to restore it.

According to Josh, the resident who emphasized lawn care in asserting ownership over individual property, looking for a vacant lot was something at the forefront of his mind when he was looking to buy his house. He wanted a property with an adjacent vacant lot so that he could apply for the Large Lots program and acquire more land, and that’s what he did. Josh closed on his house and completed the application and expected to hear back in about 9 months. That was

in the Summer of 2018. No one reached out to him to finish the process until the Summer of 2020. “It was unnecessarily long and drawn out.” he told me. “That was my experience with the program. Bureaucratic. It was a moving target.”

From Josh’s perspective, the city created the program to keep developers from purchasing the land in the “disenfranchised communities” on the South and West sides of the city and building luxury housing to drive current residents out. Still, he didn’t seem very impressed with the policy, particularly for the way he felt it enabled his less intentional neighbors. He told me an account about one of his neighbors that came across the street while he was working to clean up the “jungle” growing next to his house. “Oh, are you doing a public park?” the neighbor asked him. “This lot has never looked this good.”

“Why didn't you walk your ass across the street and clean it up?” Josh asked, clearly frustrated by the lack of initiative displayed by his neighbors as they simultaneously expected his hard work to benefit them. “I’ve got 20 other houses on the same block. Any one of them could have got the property for $1. And what I understand is one of the neighbors actually cinched the lot up at one point without paying for it.”

“Really?” I asked him.

“The city made him take the fence down, you know,” Josh said, and laughed, “Actually, that was a Chicago police detective. And he thought he could throw a fence up around a city lot and take it over.”

Josh was adamant that his hard work would come to profit himself alone. “I bet six or seven people on the block came up to me, and either said how great the lot looked or asked me if I was doing a public garden,” he said, exasperated. “You know, ain't nothing free. I ain't doing this for you. I'm doing this for me, and as soon as this is clean, I'm putting a fence around it.”

Josh clearly expresses a strong sense of ownership over his individual property and is frustrated that his neighbors express a desire for communal property without the sense of ownership—in this case, willingness to invest their time and money to make a change—that would have been required to gain access to the property.

Not everyone has had a successful application. During my interview with Ruth, she explained that her neighborhood had sought out one of the vacant lots that one of her neighborhood organizations had been stewarding for years, long before ChiBlockBuilder—the successor to the Large Lots Program, also designed to sell some of the city's vacant lots—existed. Someone had told Ruth to check with her Alderman, and if the lot was city-owned, said her organization might be considered for a purchase. During the process of trying to talk with the Alderman about their lot, things quickly got frustrating for Ruth and her team. According to Ruth, the Alderman told them no, but didn't initially explain why. "And then when I pressed for the why…the person who represents the Aldermanic office said, 'Because so many community organizations are interested in that lot.'" That rationale didn't impress Ruth. "That's a great problem to have," she exclaimed in our interview, "Just give it to somebody!"

She explained to me that after that response, she went around the Alderman directly to the Department of Planning. She told them, "Hey, I've got a vision for the space. We've stewarded the space, but we can't get aldermanic approval to purchase the space. What else is there to do?" After going back and forth with them for almost a year over phone calls and emails, the ChiBlockBuilder was launched, and Ruth say that the status of the lot they had been trying to acquire was "under review."

"It feels like now you're hiding behind technology, right? Let's give them an app, let's throw a status up that says under review." Ruth said, shaking her head, "I mean, this lot has been

baking in my community for 20 years. 20 years! And for a community not to have ownership, and to be able to do something with that space. To me, it's just a slap in the face." While Josh expressed frustration at his community's lack of individual ownership, which stemmed from their own choices, Ruth expressed frustration in her community's lack of communal ownership, stemming from the city's poorly structured communication pathways. In both scenarios, this lack of ownership comes to light because of engaging with the city's advertised efforts to increase resident ownership over vacant lots.

In another interview, I spoke with Olivia, who worked as a planner with the city, and had been involved with the ChiBlockBuilder program. Olivia explained that this issue was part of the reason they had switched from the Large Lots program to the ChiBlockBuilder: aldermen wanted more of a say in the process.

"The Large Lots program was designed in partnership with the community, but it was also done without a lot of input from Aldermen." she said. The changes the alderman wanted had to do with the perception of land that is sold for so little, the upkeep of that land when in the hands of people who were able to get it so easily, and their desire to hold off on taking action on land that could be developed down the line. Olivia found some of the arguments convincing, such as the view residents may have of cheaply sold land. This would reinforce the negative assumptions that residents made in the previous section about the value of neighborhoods with lots of vacant land. Olivia did not agree, however, with all the decisions made on which lots could be sold, and which should be left vacant. But she explained that on matters of land sale, there was little they could do without the alderman's support. "Not only would they have negative things to say about it, but all of our land sales…go through the city council and are voted on by the full city council." Olivia said, 'And if someone says, 'Don't vote for this, this

goes against my wishes in my ward.' No one's gonna vote for it. So, aldermen have, over land sales specifically, a great deal of power." The downside of the power that aldermen are now able to exert to stop changes from happening, particularly in the case of changes started by residents, is that it detracts from residents' ability to make change. Thus, this program fails to measure up to its ownership creating potential and counters an important component of residents' ownership formation process.

I pressed more into the issue Ruth expressed: why were there so many lots held by the city that weren't offered for sale to willing buyers? Olivia explained the process they had gone through to determine which lots could be sold—a process that resulted in many lots continuing to be held by the city:

> "For ChiBlockBuilder, the first pass was that environmental piece. So, after the environmental review that happened in 2021-2022, we were left with about half of the inventory that was okay to sell, including sometimes lots that are right next to each other, which is frustrating, but I can only fight with these people so much. And then we also took it to the regional planning teams to say, 'Okay, what would you like to hold back because of potential future developments or future projects. And that took out a big chunk. So, we ended up marketing about 2000 properties out of the inventory of like, 9000, potentially marketable. And so that's what's reflected on ChiBlockBuilder."

What reason might the regional planning council or aldermen have to prevent willing buyers in their community from making use of what is otherwise an eyesore? Olivia rationalized that, "Some of it is land that the city has plans for in the future." She paused, and then continued with a minor correction, "They have plans for or have plans to have plans for. I was beating up on the aldermen who don't want gardens, but the planners are even worse. There's a lot of wanting to sort of keep options open. But I think that that type of attitude is why the land has languished for

40 or 50 years. And it reflects…a lack of trust in the neighborhood." I'll expand more on the ways trust comes to play a part in vacant land in the next chapter.

This was not an alien concept to Ruth, who told me that she brought this up with the Department of Planning during their conversations:

> "I explained to them, I understand the alderpersons may have long term goals, that the chambers of commerce may have long term goals, right? When we attract these businesses, that will be perfect, but I have to live here now. So, I would rather see something beautiful in that space, other than weeds, glass, and trash. Anything! And so even if they negotiated with a community organization to say something to that effect: 'Hey, Community Organization. We'll allow you to own the land for three years. But then after that, we have to re-evaluate because we might have new development coming.' That's where I feel like now, I'm a player in what's happening. I'm a voice in what's happening in my community, not just we just don't hold it, because nobody's doing anything with it. And I just simply want to beautify it and use the space."

The lack of willingness the city has shown toward collaborating with them has led to a new approach, one that for the purposes of this research I have termed "DIY action."

To put it briefly, the Large Lots and ChiBlockBuilder programs, designed to restore ownership to residents, can instead highlight where both individual and communal ownership are lacking. Furthermore, the struggles with prolonged bureaucratic processes and the city's failure to effectively facilitate land acquisition deprive residents of change-making abilities, and thus a critical component of their ownership—the opposite of what the program is designed to do and leading some residents to seek out alternative modes of participation, such as DIY action.

*DIY Action*

As defined in the Context chapter, DIY action refers to activity that residents engage in to shape their neighborhoods without the permission of the local government or planners. In Ruth's

case, this takes the form of continuing to use the space without permission. “This year, we have decided that we're just going to do pop up events there. We're already cleaning the space, and that's what our community needs most. Our organizations don't own a brick-and-mortar building, because we don't have those types of funds, and we don't just want to go through the block party process…again, that’s a bureaucratic hold up…If we have vacant lots, why can't a community organization use it? So, our model this year is to ask for forgiveness and not permission.”

Evelyn, a community organizer, echoed the sentiment that this DIY action was spurred by ineffectiveness and bureaucracy:

> “If it gets to a point where you've been trying so, so long to have something fixed or made better, and you're getting no response? Well, you're living your lives, and you need the places in which you live to be functional, to be thriving, because why not? They should be. And so, I think that can create some complications, and we don't want people going too far. It should be up to code and following city rules and regulations, but also, I understand that you can hit a point where you just need things to be done.”

Not all DIY projects come from bureaucratic hold-ups, however. At the start of my interview with Ethan, a man living on the North side of Chicago, he told me about his effort to pick up trash around his neighborhood. “I didn't even look at the trash for 31 years. Didn't even pay attention.” Ethan said. That changed when one day he saw a pile of beer cans, but walked away assuming that someone else would take care of it. He described his realization that that would not be the case:

> “The next day, I go, and I see that nothing's changed. It's still there. I thought that's unacceptable. This looks absolutely awful. So, I got these big bags and picked all that up and walked about a two-block perimeter around where I live and just filled up these three bags of trash. And since then, it's been about over a year since then, I gotta pick up the trash. I have no choice.”

What Ethan described is an important part of the change-making component of ownership—seeing an issue and deciding to take action to fix it. Some of his acquaintances have suggested that he go to the aldermen to get attention for what he's doing, and he let me know that's the last thing he wants. "It's more of just on your own volition to do something to help your neighborhood." he said when speaking about his motivations. "I just want to do this quietly. It's more of a personal satisfaction. I feel better about myself when I do it." This distinguishes the ownership expressed by residents from that expressed by planners. While planners who conceptualized their role as one of ownership wanted to do something that was perceived well by the community, Ethan is making changes for his own fulfillment.

Charlotte also mentioned that her daughters and her will pick up trash around their neighborhood on their own, without any kind of organization or planned event. When I asked why, she responded that it came from "a sense of ownership over where I live." She explained further, "I have a family, and I want my kids to grow up in a place that feels like home for them. I want the street to look nice and well kept. Personal satisfaction."

When it comes to the effects of DIY action on the general neighborhood, most residents felt that it positively impacted the community, but to what extent was uncertain. For example, Jane expressed that while she likes to think that her neighborhood looks cleaner and safer for her efforts to beautify, she "can't really be sure." Jane said, "The one thing I can be sure about is if I fix up my front yard, other people will start fixing up their front yards. Because…it's in their immediate field of vision. But when I go further afield, like to the next block, and pick up some trash, I don't think anybody really registers who's doing that. They just know that it's a little cleaner than it used to be. If they notice anything at all." For Jane, the difference in ownership is

not determined by the act itself, but by the community and social ties related to the act, such as knowing the person who is doing it.

Based on his experience, Ethan was more convinced that the further reach could still make an impact. He explained to me that two months prior to our interview, he was walking down a particularly trashed street and decided to clear it all up, despite believing that it would return to its cluttered state in two to three days. Four days later he walked by and there was no trash at all. He was shocked, but still believed it would go back to normal in a week, but he recently went by and there was still hardly any trash. "Somebody in the neighborhood said, 'Hey, we saw you pick all the trash out. And we decided we're trying to keep this particular area clean now. Thanks for taking the initiative of doing that.'" The people on that street felt empowered to make change because they saw him taking the initiative to make change first; in expressing his ownership through DIY action, Ethan activated a sense of ownership within his neighbors as well.

*Graffiti*

Due to the inclusion of graffiti as a sign of deterioration in the literature (Sampson 2012), I decided to ask residents I interviewed if they felt like there was a prevalence of graffiti in their area. Most of them responded no, but that they did notice it every once in a while around their homes. Most participants acknowledged that graffiti was part of being in a city, and that they noticed it more around areas of public transportation or the Loop, however the reactions to this graffiti were thoroughly mixed between those who identified it as a problem and those who didn't mind seeing it.

Those who didn't mind seeing it, talked about how they saw it as part of living in a city—sometimes even entertaining them. "For months, I just saw this one that's like "Chunk!" with an exclamation point." Brenda recalled during our interview. "I would look to see if I could find Chunk! in different places. I like that kind of stuff. It doesn't bother me. It's just funny."

Disagreements with these positive associations of graffiti sometimes had to do with its association to gang activity, but more often had to do with ideas of personal property and the individualization of collective ownership. Discussing the park again, Jane emphasized "It's our park. It belongs to everybody. You can't just go up and claim it with your little tag."

Others see it as a symbol of depravity rather than a symbol of people caring. "It signals the deterioration of the neighborhood," said Alex, "If we can't be proud of what we have, then we don't need to be here." He explained that while there was limited graffiti in his current neighborhood on the North side, when he visited his old neighborhood on the West side, there were less pleasant feelings. "Every time I drive into the downtown area, and I see everything, you know, written up on walls and stuff that it hurts me a little bit to see my city deteriorating like that."

"I mean, it all comes back to like the broken windows theory and like, the kind of bullshit that that kind of brought up and planted in the minds of people." said William. He seemed more convinced that the negative associations with graffiti had more to do with what people had heard about graffiti in the past than the reality of the situation. "It's been debunked since. Repeatedly. But it's in the back of people's minds. So, I think people are always like, 'Oh, it's blight. People don't care about where they live.' And it's like, no, they care about where they live. There are other factors and things going on that you just don't understand." Henry expanded on this sentiment and criticized the previous mayor's aggressive stance on every piece of graffiti as

erasing an important part of the city. “I think the graffiti that I see, if it's not gang related, shows that people are out there doing things. I like to imagine what those people's lives are like and what their inspirations are. Some of it looks good and some of it looks bad, but it shows that there's activity. I think it's pretty value neutral.”

Beyond value neutral, some would even argue that it's value positive, usually when it’s organized by the community as a means of asserting ownership as opposed to an individual asserting it on their own. For example, Adelita, a Native American woman heavily involved in advocacy for the Native American community within the city of Chicago, explained how an organized mural would help them in a new building project:

> “On one side of the building we're going to do a mural. Just letting people know. You want to look at it and say, ‘that's Native American.’ So, we want to have the Native American art. Because it's coming east from the river, we have it look like the river is flowing through the building with the North and South Branch of the river. So, we just want to be recognized that we are here. And we are a vibrant community. I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say, ‘Oh, I didn't know there were Native Americans in Chicago.’ I can't tell you how many times I've heard people say that. No, we're here.”

Another example of this is the neighborhood Pilsen, which William discussed as an example of good graffiti. “There's just a lot of great graffiti art. I think it is an expression of the community, and I don't think it's problematic. I think Pilsen has done a great job of embracing that and promoting it almost to an extent…so I'm for it,” William said. And then, he reiterated the point made by others about graffiti’s impact being dependent on its location and its content. “I think it depends on like, what it's on and what it is. But I think it's actually an artistic expression. I think it's good.”

In essence, many residents find graffiti entertaining or an assertion of action within the community while some continue to associate it with the destruction of personal property and a

neighborhood's deterioration. Part of this distinction comes from whether the graffiti is placed on individual property by an individual or organized on communal property by a group. Organized murals offer an interesting example of the power these visual claims can have in asserting ownership, and communities may allow unorganized art to flourish to offer similar avenues for expression.

## SUMMARY

This chapter explored multiple facets of ownership's influence on the way residents consider engagement with shaping the area in which they live. First, residents defined their sense of ownership over their community in three main ways: investment, social cohesion, and change making abilities. Residents who were also planners, though equipped with a lot of power to make change in the communities they work in, refrained from referring to it as ownership, and more often sought out different words to describe the relationship they had with those work environments such as facilitation or investment. Ownership was referred to in two different spheres: individual and communal. Individual ownership manifested itself in stories about shaping one's personal property as a means of contributing to the neighborhood, while communal ownership consisted of caring for areas that were held by everyone. The financial investment piece of ownership is complicated by the divide between renters and owners, the former of which are perceived as contributing somewhat less. Qualitative data suggests that this divide has less to do with a matter of financial investment and more to do with the temporal investment of residents. This can be further complicated by the logistical hurdles of connecting with residents in infrastructure like apartment buildings and the social stigma that may prevent renters from participating.

These principles manifest themselves in a myriad of ways throughout the city. In the context of vacant land, the lack of community ownership or visible ownership and maintenance over these spaces further depreciates the sense of ownership among residents who experience it. City initiatives to return this land to the community through the Large Lots Program and/or ChiBlockBuilder can further highlight lack of ownership by highlighting neighbors' lack of initiative or powerlessness. This can cause residents to turn toward methods of changemaking that do not ask the city's permission—asserting their ownership over the neighborhood. Graffiti can demonstrate to some residents that people do not have enough ownership to care for the area in which they live—usually in the context of private property, while others find it amusing—usually in the context of spaces that are underutilized and not owned by any particular person. This is distinguished from property that is owned by everyone; in which case, graffiti can be seen as an attempt to overexert one's level of ownership and is not accepted by the community.

What this chapter does not yet explore are the ways in which a sense of trust in local government, planners, and even other residents can intersect with these processes or even impact how people engage with their city in its own right. In the next chapter, I will dissect that element of the community shaping process.

# FINDINGS CHAPTER 3: TRUST

In addition to ownership, this thesis examines how trust can influence the ways in which people participate in shaping their city. This chapter seeks to answer: how is trust formed within the context of city development and how does that formation (or lack thereof) then impact engagement? Using further analysis of the 1-on-1 interviews I conducted, community meetings I attended, and quantitative data collected by the Chicago Department of Public Health (CDPH) and the American Community Survey (ACS), I consider a comprehensive answer to this question. First, I examine the formation of resident trust in the local government, considering factors such as history and the role of the aldermen within the community. Next, I pivot toward a related, but slightly different issue: residents' trust in planners and conversely, planners' trust in residents. Following this section, I take time to discuss respondents' methods of building trust and the insights that can be gained from both planners' and residents' perspectives. Then I examine the trust residents have with one another, particularly in terms of how those relationships are used to gain traction in community organizing efforts. Finally, I look at how these ideas manifest within city initiatives and issues, specifically community meetings, We Will Chicago, and the presence of vacant lots.

## TRUST IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT

When considering how residents may conceive of their trust with the city, it is important to first distinguish between local government and planners. I refer to the local government as the aldermen and their staff, while planners are referred to separately. In many cases planners are working with and/or through the local government in the work they do, but they are distinct.

First, we will examine: how is trust in the local government (whether they have residents' best interests in mind and their ability to follow through with their plans) formed or harmed?

*Distribution of Trust*

First, let's examine how trust in local government is distributed across the city. Although data on trust in planners specifically has not been collected, the city of Chicago has data that explicitly measures the amount of trust residents have in their local government. I took this data from the Chicago Health Atlas, and plotted it in Figure 16, which shows the percentage of people in each community area who say they trust their local government. The average percent of people who say they trust the city across community areas is 43.6% with a standard deviation across community areas of 11.1%, indicating that most people across the city of Chicago do not trust the local government. There appears from this graph to be a slightly higher proportion of residents who trust in the local government on the North side of Chicago. On the North side of Chicago, the average trust level is 49.6%, with the values for these community areas ranging from 34.5%-68.5% (standard deviation of 7.6%). This average lowers to 42.3% in the South, with community area values ranging from 22.9%-70.6% (standard deviation of 12.5%). It is the lowest in the West with an average of 38.3% from community areas values between 23.1%-52.9% (standard deviation 9.2%). This finding is significant for two reasons. First, the average levels of trust in the South and West parts of the city are lower than the city average, while the average levels of trust in the North are higher. Second, the South contains the community area with the highest level of trust, the community area with the lowest level of trust, and the highest levels of standard deviation. These patterns, and this larger North, West, South divide could be

influenced by many factors, one of them being the degree of Hardship experienced by the South and West sides of the city.

As discussed in the previous chapter, the Hardship Index is a score that denotes a series of neighborhood concerns with poverty, vacancy, trash, etc. We also saw in that chapter that Hardship was disproportionately concentrated on the South and West sides of Chicago. In Figure 17, I compare the Hardship Index and degree of trust in the local government for each of the community areas in Chicago, and there is a significant negative correlation between the amount of Hardship a neighborhood experiences and its degree of trust in the local government. This means that neighborhoods experiencing greater hardship are less likely to trust the local government will do what's right for the community. This makes sense given the relationship between the local government, the decisions that led to these disparities, and chronic levels of hardship on the South and West sides such as the persistence of vacant lots, closed schools, etc. This connection between hardship and lack of trust resonates with Putnam's observation of less trust among Black and financially burdened communities (Putnam 2000). Residents, even those that were not alive during these government missteps, hold

Figure 16: Trust in Local Government

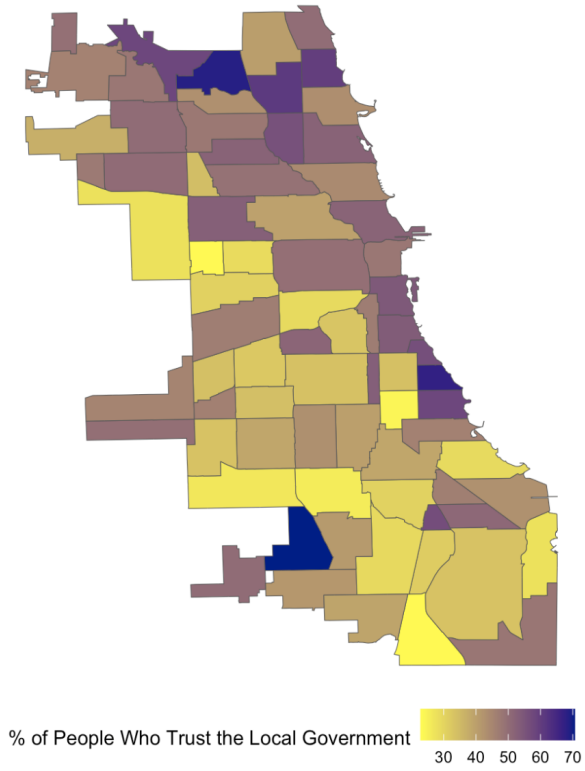
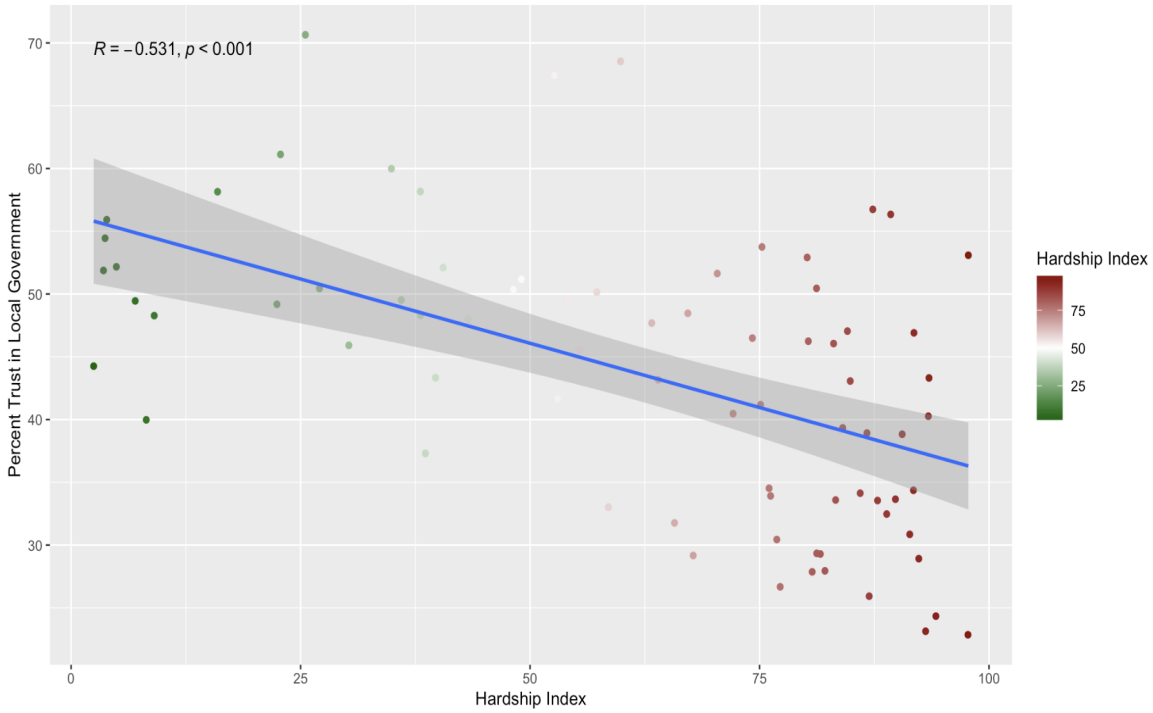


Figure 17: The Impact of Harship on Local Government Trust




these instances close as a part of their history, and speak of the enduring impacts of these events on current levels of trust in their communities.

*Impact of History*

The We Will Chicago project began with a Research Kickoff Meeting hosted on Zoom, now recorded and available publicly online. About halfway through, there was a section entitled Historical Reckoning & Past Planning Efforts. Emilia Chico, a "third generation southeast side Chicago" resident led the section, saying "Reckoning is necessary, reckoning is urgent, and make no mistake, it is about disrupting systems of oppression." She continued with the presentation, later saying, "I have love for Chicago deep in my soul, yet I'm often reminded that me and my people, my elders, my ancestors, have been poisoned and discarded for decades. I have reckoned

with this traumatic past to relocate the love and commitments I have to transforming this city of ours" (Chicago DPD 2021).

In my interviews, many people mentioned the significant impact that history had on levels of trust for themselves and for their community. Adelita, a Native American community organizer, explained how the trauma experienced by the Native American community led them to organize:

> "In the 1950s, there was the Indian Relocation Act. What they did was they went on to the reservations…and give some of the tribal members $100 and a one-way bus ticket to the nearest large city. They said that there would be housing services, jobs, and everything, but once they got here, there was nothing. There were some jobs, but there was no housing. So, they have to try and find what they could…and so that's why the American Indian Center was developed in 1953."

To this day, in spite of the city making attempts to address the wrongs they committed in the past, this community continues to struggle with trust for the government because of this slight that their ancestors faced:

> "Thankfully, the city of Chicago and the Department of Housing did a survey of all the projects that they have done in the city. And they realized that they've really not done anything for the Native American community. And so, they reached out to the American Indian Center…to say, 'We would like to help you get housing,'...They've helped us all along the way to make sure that this project is a wonderful part of our community, but working with our Native American community there, they still don't believe it's going to happen. You know what I mean? Because we were promised housing 50 years ago, and we're just now getting it. So, until we actually break that ground, they just still do not believe it's gonna happen, although we're pretty far down the road. They've been promised so much, and then the rug has been taken away from under them, so it's still hard for them to trust anything that the government says.

In the Black communities on the South side of Chicago there is a similar phenomenon. At the ward meeting that I attended in South Chicago, there was significant pushback on an initiative to bring migrants into the South side of Chicago. Most people expressing their concerns

about this initiative drew on the historical lack of investment in the people of the Southern region of Chicago as their reasons for doubting the city had their best interests in mind when suggesting the location to put them. Ruth (South) elaborated on this sentiment in our interview, explaining her own experience at a community meeting on the subject. “Our community was not pushing back against people who were in need of shelter,” she explained, “But you [the city] continue to ignore what we need in our community. And now, you're going to ask us to bear an additional burden, but you're still not recognizing your community homelessness, people in need of mental health services, people in need of this and in need of that. Why can't we talk at that level? It ain’t about people. It is about the disinvestment that has occurred in our communities.”

Thus, a history of government harm impacts the development of trust in the local government by reducing the ability of the community to regain trust in the city, even in the presence of efforts to repair previous damage, as well as enhancing the mistrust the community feels when possible further missteps are engaged in by the city. This is especially hard when the results of these wrongdoings are visible every day, in the presence of vacant lots, abandoned buildings, and factors that make up the hardship index, such as crowded housing.

*Aldermen’s Impact*

Trust can also be formed in the present by the action or inaction of the aldermen who govern each of the wards.

In my conversation with Ruth, she explained to me her frustrations with the way the city government is set up, and how its structure further limits her ability to trust:

> “I feel that the aldermen have to be more accountable to their constituents. They group a certain group of constituents and say, ‘Well, they're happy.’ But what about the other 90%? I truly think that as communities in Chicago, we need to know where the money is going, because we pay the taxes in our community. We

> need to have a seat at that table that says where those monies will be spent. And I think we need to move more into a council level with our Aldermen. Not the way that I feel aldermanic powers and prerogatives are, is that the alderperson feels like 'This is my kingdom, the Ward, and this is what I dictate will happen.' That can be right. And so, I know, the city of Chicago historically has had the alderperson rule, but I do think that it needs to morph into a more inclusive process where you make sure that the voices of your constituents are represented."

Her lack of trust is intertwined here with a lack of ownership, and she expresses that restoring the former will have to go hand in hand in creating avenues for the latter. Ownership in the process of what's happening, she says, is how trust can be rebuilt. However, it isn't just the structure of power while Aldermen are in office that impacts trust; it's also the echoes of the decisions they've made after being removed from power. Naomi (South) said:

> "What kind of further erodes the trust is that you have these decisions that get made. And then because you've had changes and city leadership, there's no continuity. So, a decision that was made under one administration cannot be explained by another administration. And so that also further erodes the trust. And I think it's not necessarily because the current administration can't speak to that decision, but it further underscores that the decision wasn't made as a result of informed policy, but for other reasons. That really exacerbates the lack of trust that people have."

Naomi is pointing out that the lack of continuity between administrations is not the cause of mistrust, but it's demonstrative of a deeper reality: that decisions are not embedded within the community, but instead at the hands of the individual aldermen.

Unlike historical impact, which is felt primarily on the South and West sides of the city, the impact of alderman on trust is something spread across all regions of Chicago, for better or for worse. Stacey (North) expressed a lack of trust regarding the process of redistricting and appeasing the aldermen. "Sometimes the city does not meet us eye to eye. On a local level we've

had turmoil with aldermen, there's been a re-designation of the ward." I asked her more about what she meant, referring to the redistricting process. And she explained her suspicions:

> "I don't know…I guess it's the city that does that and I've heard some very bad reasons why they do it. But um you know, that's kind of above my head. I don't really get it. But we had our previous Alderman where we were like the bastard stepchild because we, our ethnic community, did not vote for him. And he tried very hard to win us over but failed. And then the line was redrawn. I don't know if he had the power to have done something about that or not. I don't know. It is odd. It was really strange."

She further elaborated that there have been good experiences as well as bad, explaining that "We really have not had the best of trust with city hall. In some cases, there were aldermen that I adored, and I trusted, and there have been those that I wouldn't trust with a 10-foot pole…I've had good and bad experiences with the aldermen."

Rebecca (North) expressed shock when her elected officials acted in ways they weren't supposed to. "Just before he left office, he designated that our block would be zoned parking. City ordinances require that you educate the community and ask for consent, none of which was done," Rebecca said, "So we just woke up one morning…it's like, wait a minute. Totally imposed on us." This shock didn't seem to come from high expectations from her local government, however. "I don't trust the local government," she said, "I think politicians are politicians. You hope they have the best interests of the general community at heart, and they can't prioritize one person, although they should at least listen. I guess that's where I'm coming from."

There are also instances in which a good alderman leads to a positive experience for members of the community. Jerry (North) reported having a positive experience with his aldermen:

> "I've been lucky in this neighborhood. The aldermen we've had have been very willing to work with the community. And there were no under the table deals. There were no instances of everybody hating an idea, but all of a sudden, the alderman approved it. Nothing like that has happened in my decades here in this neighborhood. And I know what's happened in other neighborhoods. I know people live through it. But that's one reason you have to be very careful about who you elect as Alderman."

These positive experiences have the potential to increase residents' trust in the local government, because they prove that the local government is capable of listening and behaving honestly. Forming the calculus-based and relational trust needed for residents to trust institutions like the local government requires experiences displaying the local government is both competent and dedicated to serving residents. Unfortunately, these experiences were reported far less frequently than negative ones.

In summary, mistrust is formed through the concentration of hardship, historic wrongdoing, the lack of continuity between or poor performance of city aldermen. Trust in local government is low across the city, particularly on the South and West sides where this historic wrongdoing was concentrated and where the challenges of disinvestment and hardship persist. Even among those who already have very low expectations for or trust in local government still seem to be impacted by disappointment to the extent that it reinforces their lack of trust in the local government. Those who have had positive experiences with their aldermen, and therefore a positive sense of trust, are still aware of the negative associations commonly held about the local government. Another closely linked experience that residents have which impacts their trust, is their experience with planners—that is, those who are explicitly working to change the physical landscape of the neighborhood, with or without the input of the residents in the area. These experiences we will turn to next.

## TRUST IN PLANNERS

As I mentioned previously, there is a lot of overlap between planners and the local government when it comes to shaping the physical environment of the neighborhood. Planners can either work for a private company or the city itself. In either case, there is often collaboration between the planners and the aldermen to connect with the residents in the ward. My interviews indicated that people generally had some degree of understanding of the distinction but saw their roles overlapping in many ways. As Jane (North) explained to me who organized community meetings in her area, she reported that "very often it's a combination" and that "the alderman is usually in on some of these things. If it's a zoning thing, the Alderman has the last word on that…it's a variety of agencies and officials." I want to uncover: what are the ways that residents form an understanding of their trust in planners? Despite the overlap, there seemed to be some unique ways that residents formed an understanding of their trust in planners specifically, primarily through previous experiences they have had interacting with planners on projects.

### *Resident Interactions with Planning*

In addition to major historical events impacting trust in local government, some participants mentioned that the formation of trust between residents and the government might be impeded by their previous personal experiences, negatively impacting their trust in future processes offered by the city. Chloe, a community engagement worker among Asian American communities and resident form the South explained:

> "Because I think that some communities have the culture where folks participate more probably because of the history of the communities, other communities, not as much. I can see it causing, not just immigrant communities, but other communities that have been historically disenfranchised, to not want to

> participate, because they haven't seen the results. They haven't seen positive results of participation in the past. So, I think that that's another thing that I want to point out…If the community has seen years of participating in meetings, and nothing ever comes to pass, that is the way community members start to see them as discouraging and false and don't want to participate anymore.

Evelyn, a community engagement worker from the South side explained a similar phenomenon in the Black community:

> "I think that there's always this kind of potentially tense relationship of like, 'are people acting in good faith?' As community members we will work with city staffers and officials and this machine to try to make something happen and try to follow the processes and procedures they have put before folks to navigate. But I think when things take too long, or people get disregarded, or you just don't hear anything back, or when things feel like they're just superficial like you did the thing to make it look like you were listening, and you already had plans. I think those kinds of things can really damage a sense of agency. And it really fosters that skepticism and distrust. It just takes things multiple steps back."

Sarah, a planner from the West side, also expressed an awareness of the impact previous experience can have. "Depending on where residents are coming from, and if they have participated in planning processes, sometimes there is a distrust of any kind of professional," she said.

Altogether, these experiences demonstrate how communities, particularly those that have been historically disenfranchised, may be hesitant to trust planners due to the lack of positive outcomes that they have experienced in past engagement. The failure to witness tangible results, prolonged processes, disregard shown for community input, and seemingly superficial engagement practices all contribute to a sense of discouragement, skepticism, and distrust, hindering their willingness to participate in the future.

*Planners' Conceptualization*

I asked planners how they knew when residents were trusting them, and many respondents answered with the recognition of how residents might respond in a state of mistrust based on their past experiences. One of the ways planners knew they were being trusted, however, was when residents told them openly and honestly what their lives were like, as William (North) described:

> "I think they open up. There's obviously canned answers like, 'That's what I could afford' or 'This is where I grew up' or 'My job is a block away,' but if they start telling you 'Oh, because there's a little community center that I could go throw pottery at' or 'There's a great spot where my kids can meet up with other kids' or they start to give you a little bit more personal information, you know these guys are serious about it. They are actually trusting you with this information and that you're going to actually use it in a productive way. They know [I'm] not just here faking it to like, be like, 'Okay, I did my community meeting. Check. I've already got the plan done, but I told them I was going to do community engagement.' So, they're here to pretend to do this dog and pony show."

Leo (South) explained a similar phenomenon. He said one of the best ways to know if residents are trusting is "if they're being frank with you." He continued, explaining:

> "It's a big sign that they're taking the conversation seriously, that they feel respected enough to open up about real issues and not just, you know, more general issues. If you can really get into the details of a particular proposal or project or issue, I think that is a symbol of trust, because people maybe think they can open up a little more about specific issues, as opposed to just saying, 'Well, I hate all cars' or something like that, making general statements. So, the more specific, it seems like the more trust there might be in a process or conversation."

Abigail (North) also expressed that the residents she worked with being vocal were her indicator of whether she was being trusted, particularly around questions they had.

> "I'm an optimist by nature. So, I assume when we're closing a meeting, or we're having an open feedback portion of the meeting, that if people have questions or concerns that they will voice them. When they do, I'm assuming I'm being trusted,

> because the information that they're trying to get is from me. I also think that trust is something that has to be built and not just openly granted. So, I always go in with like, the onus is on me to build trust."

Overall, the degree to which residents are honest and vocal about their real concerns is the metric through which planners internally measure how much they are being trusted. Later in this chapter, I will discuss in more detail the methods of building trust that planners and residents describe.

*Residents' Conceptualization*

I also asked residents what it would mean to trust the planners that came into their communities to make changes. Many of them emphasized their lack of trust of planners and developers (calling into question the candor metric planners described in the previous section as an accurate measure of resident trust), and many of them described their trust in planners in terms of what the planners did to get them to trust them. For example, Jane (North) said she trusts planners "when they actually do something" that she wants to see happen. And Brenda (North) described that it meant "honesty and transparency."

Rebecca (North) explained that it's difficult for her to trust planners. "I go in from a position of not much trust," she said, "because I think a lot of this is about money." She described an exception—an organization that does work for homeless women. "Today, they're groundbreaking for a new building, and I know the organization and I trust them. Because I see that they do what they say." For Rebecca, what hinders trust is both a previously established negative view of planning (being all about money) and a lack of knowledge about the planners coming into her area to do work. However, once she sees a group doing what they say they will do, she is able to trust them.

Enough residents spoke about their trust in terms of what planners should be doing to build trust as opposed to what it meant on their part to trust planners. This is significant, because it suggests that not enough trust has been established for most residents to conceive of what trusting planners means on their part. I will analyze the responses of residents and planners as to what building trust should look like in a later section of this chapter.

## TRUST IN RESIDENTS

Part of the trust narrative that is often overlooked when it comes to city planning is the trust that planners have in the residents they are working with. Do planners trust residents, and what does that mean to them? How do residents conceptualize receiving trust from planners? I asked each of my interviewees what it meant for planners to trust them, and to those who worked as planners what it meant for them to trust residents. I also asked those that worked in community engagement what it meant to trust residents to compare their perspectives to those of planners, since they also engage with residents but often have different methods.

### *Planners' Perspectives*

When I asked planners about what it means to trust residents in their work, some of them were at first confused. "I don't really know," said Leo (South). "I feel we would have to earn their trust. I'm not sure that I feel like I have to trust other residents. I would hope that any interactions we have would have mutual respect, but…I don't think I've ever thought about that. I guess I have been more concerned about whether or not people will trust me. It's what we're doing and talking about and saying." Leo's observations reflect on a larger trend in the world of community engagement to focus largely on what the first half of this chapter has discussed—

improving residents' trust in the local government and in planners (Antunes, Barroca, and Oliveira 2021)[11]. The discipline has done much less to consider how planners should conceptualize their trust of residents. Olivia (North) pointed this out when she explained, "I think that [trusting residents] is a real challenge. I don't think it's something that the profession does very well."

She went on to explain some of the understanding she has built of what it means to trust residents:

> "I have the opportunity to talk to residents a bit, and when I think about trusting residents, I think about being truthful about what I am capable of doing, what is outside my control, and where I see failings in the system. I try to be honest as much as I can, while also being professional, and some people respond really well to that, and some people don't. But I think that's where, for me, trusting people comes in: trusting them to understand. I think that my department as a whole hasn't been great at that."

Other planners expressed a similar definition of trusting residents in terms of knowledge and way of speaking to them. Abigail (North) explained that when it comes to trusting residents, she "doesn't see it as a choice" and tries to embody that with clear communication. "I think being transparent to the individuals that I'm speaking with is incredibly important…we translate the technical and so that sometimes can create opportunities for both great learning and maybe instances of inaccurate translation."

Liam (North) explained that his expression of trust in residents is also part of what contributes to their trust in him. He said:

> "It's very important to make it clear that whatever kind of analysis we've done, we recognize that it is just a small part of all of the things that might make up a neighborhood. That whatever data and facts we're providing is really meant to

[11] Deloitte is a prominent consulting firm that has created a Smart City Solution Center to focus on improving cities. Across Deloitte's 12 trends mentioned, many of them involved building or fostering trust.

> enhance things that residents know. I'm going to make it clear that there's nothing they can't ask. I know that this is all meant to be things that they respond to, but it's not cast in stone. All we're trying to do is some kind of reasonable analysis. Here's what we've learned so far. We know there's many things we don't know. Please tell us that kind of thing. I think that the key thing is never to suggest that somehow, we have some definitive understanding of something. Because that will get you in trouble."

The rest of his answer pivoted back to things that he does to build the rapport between himself and the residents, once again underscoring how the prevalence of trust in planners within the field has overshadowed trust in residents. Planners continue to conceptualize trust *in* residents, as trust *from* residents or the ways that they at least strive to gain trust from residents.

A couple of the planners I spoke with offered their insights into ensuring residents knew that the planners trusted them. William (North) insisted that listening was key. "I think it really comes down to questions like what is your experience? Tell me about you. What is your daily life? What drew you to this place? What are your aspirations for this place? What do you want this to be? And then let's figure out a way to get to that place," William said. "I would say listening is key." Sarah (West) said that, when it comes to trusting residents, she relies on her intuition, and a lot of listening, similar to William:

> I use a lot of non-tangible ways of seeing a room and listening. And I really rely on my gut a lot, especially in public engagement of any kind with residents, or stakeholders, and communities. What that intuition does for me is it helps me relate to what people are saying and how they are feeling…trusting residents, for me, you can kind of hear it. I think it's more of a feeling. And it's also the words that people use, because in listening to people, you can definitely tell when they're feeling threatened, or when they're saying things to divert conversations to very small things or places instead of focusing on the issue at hand. So, from my perspective, trust building is getting people to a place where I hear them talking less about their personal one thing that they can only focus on and start focusing on, you know, whatever the project is, or context that's larger than just themselves.

Planners also mentioned the challenges with trusting residents in their work. Olivia pointed out that "there are some people who are always going to be oppositional to change, there are some people who are just wondering what's in it for them." She said, "Once you start dealing with more than two people, it becomes really challenging. At a certain point, you have to pick a lane and stick with it and believe that you're right and incorporate feedback. But I'm not sure what we would do if it was democratic 100% of the time."

Overall, planners find conceptualizing and articulating trust in residents challenging, partially due to a large focus on getting residents to trust them. Those that can do so focus on transparent communication, acknowledging their own limitations, and actively listening to residents' experiences and aspirations. Some planners also note difficulty fully trusting residents, particularly when facing multiple perspectives and resident opposition.

*Community Organizers' Perspectives*

I also spoke with some residents who do a lot of work in community organizing to see how their perceptions of trusting residents compared to those of planners. Unlike planners, the residents who work in community organizing have other jobs but engage in community organizing as a smaller job or stepped up to serve as facilitators of community feedback during the We Will Chicago process.[12] Naomi (South) said that it was about believing that people know where they come from. "Yeah, I kind of go in with a sense of trust that because people live in their communities, they know their communities best, and I just have a certain level of respect for that perspective," she said. Evelyn (South) said something very similar, stating trust is that "you respect that people are the experts of their own experience, and that they know what they're

[12] The city of Chicago hired artists to more creatively solicit resident feedback in an attempt to overcome the lack of trust in the city present in many communities of interest.

living through. Respect what they're going to tell you, and that they have some ideas about the things that would make it better for them."

Sofia, a renter in the South who has done some work in community organizing, also expressed her desire for planners trust in very similar terms:

> "Trust that we actually know what we want and need, because one of the things I've seen [from planners] is the need to come in and be our savior. Okay, you come in with knowledge, you come in with skills that's respected and understood. But you also need to come in with humility and understand that those skills and the knowledge can only go so far…don't come in with an attitude of 'I'm about to tell you what you need, you need ABCD.' No, say, 'I'm about to really understand you and why you feel this way and think this way, and what you need, and see what I can do with my abilities to make this better.'"

They also pointed out that there have been some challenges with trust. Naomi said, "My issues of trust are usually just if people show up as close-minded advocates for a particular perspective. Or if they try to undermine the process, or are intent on providing misinformation, or just demonstrate that their goal is not with good intentions." She explained, however, that even then she tries to express trust by having honest and transparent communication. She said, "My approach is to tell people, you know, one, I'm going to provide you with the information that I know. It may not be what you want to hear, but it's what is available to me. And secondly, you know, the goal isn't about being right as an individual, but trying to make the best choice for the community." This response, focused on transparency and effective communication, seemed very similar to the ideas shared by planners.

*Residents' Perspectives*

When I asked residents what it meant for planners to trust them, most of their responses mentioned that what they were discussing with me wasn't typically happening. In other words,

their responses were mostly an ideal vision about what they wanted from planners rather than a reality they had experienced.

One important criterion for residents was being included in the process. Chloe (South) said that she knows planners trust her and her community "if they involve community members and decisions come back with follow-up information and progress." Alex (North) made a similar observation.

> "It means coming to the community during the planning stages. I realize there's overhead involved, and it can't take forever to do the planning, but they should come in options. Like 'These are options that may affect you.' And if there's something that's not right about these options, ask 'what kind of remedies can we do to address them?' It's a matter of building trust, and I don't think that trust is there."

Vera (West) understood trust and inclusion in terms of honest and clear communication about the project. To her, trust is present "when there's a moratorium of understanding that is signed and outlines all of the tasks that need to be performed." I'll outline specific examples of some of these projects in the Issues/Initiatives section later.

For others, trust was about having their value as contributors acknowledged. Rebecca (North) described trust as a combination of listening and transparency:

> "It's making a note and saying, 'Oh, we hadn't thought about that' or 'Oh, I see where that could be important to you' and then they tell me what their plan of action is to address that. Whether it's 'I will ask Mike, who was in charge of landscaping, or John, who's in charge of parking, to look at this.' Just to make some sort of commitment. Even if they say, 'When we were initially planning this, we thought about X, Y, Z. And as it turned out, we're not going to be able to do that.' It's being honest. That would satisfy me. I mean, I wouldn't be happy about it, but at least I'm feeling heard rather than dismissed."

Brenda (North) said that she feels trusted when planners make the effort to collect as much information from the neighborhood as possible. “I like when they’re able to collect information in different ways,” she said. “To recognize that not everybody is going to speak up in a big hall, so they’re finding different ways to incorporate feedback. That makes me feel like they trust me.”

This section focuses on an often-overlooked part of trust in city planning—the trust that planners have in the residents they engage with. Planners’ perspectives highlight this gap and underscore the recent emphasis on getting residents to trust planners. Those that can articulate this concept focus on the importance of transparent communication and active listening. Community organizers felt similar values were a part of trust, emphasizing the importance of trusting residents to be the experts of their own experiences. Residents also echoed the same conceptualization of trust from planners including a desire for inclusion in the process, communication, and acknowledgement in their value as contributors. Despite challenges mentioned, these findings underscore the importance of reciprocation in forging trust between residents and planners.

**BUILDING TRUST**

Due to the emphasis that has been placed on the lack of trust between residents and the city (both local government and planners), many of my participants spoke about their experiences with a normative perspective, answering two questions: First, what do residents think planners should be doing to build trust? Second, how do planners describe their current approaches to building trust? Rather than a conceptual approach of what trust looks like, these responses center on actual methods used.

*Residents' Ideas*

The primary features of residents' suggestions on methods for building trust were transparency and communication. Ruth (South) explained that for her to trust planners, she has to understand what the process is. Furthermore, that the lack of clear communication suggests bad intent:

> "If you are truly working to deliver effective communities, viable communities, quality communities, I don't think anything should be a secret, even when you have to prioritize maybe the central business district or downtown over community X. People understand it for a time. You can't keep saying for five years, ten years, twenty years, 'Oh, yeah, we don't have funds for your community yet, because we're still working on the central business district.' As a resident, I'm gonna tell them, 'You don't have a great business model if all you do is spend the money in the central business district. Can't you come up with another model. Maybe the central business district has its own funds, and now you have money for the community?' It's that type of transparency and dialogue that the planners have to share with the people. Because here's my next part; when you want developers to develop in Chicago, I'm sure you're telling them something, so why are we afforded that same luxury? Tell us something, don't just put us as second-class citizens, because if the developers put up a building, but our community feels like, 'Yeah, that ain't for me', guess what? It's gonna fail. So, you've got to give both sides a little something to say, 'Hey, this is coming. Is there anything that you would like to see in this development? And what would you support if it came to your community?' So, I think the city can do, the planners can do a lot better in that aspect."

As I watched the We Will Chicago pillar meeting recordings, she expressed another desire from planners: to work within existing pathways of trust. "Our communities are very territorial," she explained, as they discussed how to get more participants for the program. "We do not appreciate someone from outside coming in to say 'Hey, let's do a peace circle.' So, you have to work through the existing organizations that have already established relationships with

the people. And if you can get those organizations to say ‘Hey!’ and they recognize that name, they have a tendency to respond a little bit better.”

Another theme that took center stage was the need to see the results enacted. Evelyn (South) explained that planning can sometimes get in its own way in terms of developing trust. “We talk so much, and we plan so much, and those cycles are very good at happening over and over again,” she said, “But I think what will tip that needle in the positive direction is for us folks to really begin to see some of the things that have been talked about so long beginning to manifest. I think that will go a long way toward healing those wounds, and having folks have more faith in city planning processes.”

*Planners’ Approaches*

Planners’ responses also tended to center around building trust with residents. Olivia (North) began by explaining that she is working to address the trust gap by not getting bogged down in it to begin with:

> “Residents don't trust me. That's something that I've encountered throughout my career, because I have been working in spaces where the people, I'm encountering have been let down. And so, I sort of have decided that, like, it is not actually incumbent on me, doing my work, to have people trust me. Actions speak louder than words. I don't need to convince someone that what I'm doing is good. I just need to try to do good work. That's the approach that I take. Certainly, I have individual conversations with people or even in community meeting settings. Like, sometimes what I have to say is well received, other times not. And I can't like, as a white person in the year 2023 be like, ‘No, no, no, you just don't get it,’ because people do get it. And they have every reason to feel distrust. I just can't put that out myself. I just have to keep the work going. It took generations for us to get to where we are and it's gonna take generations to repair.”

Abigail (North), felt similarly resigned to her inability to make people trust her, did still hope that the ways she conveyed information would help to foster some sense of trust:

> "I don't expect them to trust me. I give them all the information in the best way I can, and hope that they trust me. And if they don't, I always encourage them to find other routes…I've found that working really hard to gain someone's trust isn't always…it's hard. It's hard to know where to invest your time, because if someone's like, 'I'll never trust you,' and then you're like, 'I'm gonna try harder,' that might not always work. And so, I always just still lean back on 'What is my job? What is my role?' and then hope that people find their way to the information they're looking for."

Others had more explicit methods for gaining trust. Liam (North) used aspects of his identity to relate to people. "I'm keenly aware that I have, like, the perfect white guy voice and a very specific look. I will play up my accent a little bit, I will sound a little more country than I actually naturally would," he said. "That plays well with anyone, frankly, whether it's other white folks, black folks or Latinos, they just do their thing." He also said that, beyond just his voice, he is always careful about what he says:

> "Very explicitly, I never ever, ever, ever talk down to people. I use a lot of words very carefully. You'll notice I rarely use large words, but I do use very clear and specific words. And I think people appreciate the fact that at no time, am I saying 'Oh, this person clearly never got out of high school, and they live in this South side neighborhood, so I better slow down.' I don't do that."

Outside of modes of communication, Charlotte (North) sees her responsibility with trust as an issue of communicating to residents in a clear way what they do and do not have control over:

> "I think for me, as a planner, it means that I am responsible for coming to interaction or an engagement with a clear framing of what the question at hand is, or what the opportunity is, so that the conversation I'm having with a resident is appropriate and can be mutually beneficial in building trust. By that I mean, if we come to someone, and we're like, 'Hey, what color do you want?' or 'Do you want a five story or two story building there?' then they go off on all their personal things about what they like and the color and brick and all that kind of stuff. But they don't actually get to make those decisions. Then there's a lack of

> trust between both of us because I'm like, 'Why are they spouting off about this, when it doesn't even matter?' and they're like, 'Hey, I told them everything I liked, and look, they put up that one story building over there.' So, I think it's really important to build trust with community members through your role of being very clear with what the ask is, where they can provide input, and designing your questions and your engagement to be mutually beneficial."

Residents and planners alike acknowledge the critical role of trust in effective city planning. In suggesting ways that this lack of trust can be overcome in practice, residents tend to focus on transparency and clear communication while planners focus on actions over words.

## NEIGHBOR RELATIONSHIPS

Something that I did not ask about explicitly but came up in many of the conversations I had was the impact that the closeness of relationships within the neighborhood had for many residents in their perceived and actual ability to make an impact on what was being built in their community. "My ability to influence what's going on, and to be able to influence what's going on to a certain degree in my neighborhood," said Olivia (North), "is definitely impacted by the fact that I have a very strong social network here." What exactly are the impacts that these strong social ties might be creating? There is trust between the residents that yields more effective action with the city, and trust that is garnered from planners when residents act in an organized and cohesive manner.

First, residents expressed that strong networks empower them to act on the issues within the neighborhood that they care about. This closely mirrors what was expressed when residents discussed social cohesion as a part of their sense of ownership; some level of trust between residents is key in the formation of these relationships. "It's almost like a precursor before anything else happens," said Ruth (South), giving an example of a vacant lot project that requires

the whole community to chip in at different levels of the process. “Maybe some people are able to buy the vacant lots all on their own right? Or maybe they're able to buy a multi-unit building all on their own. But that's not everybody's lived experience,” she said. For those like her who wanted to take action, it would have to take an organized group of like-minded individuals to pitch in. Jerry (North) gave another example involving community organization for advocacy. “If somebody is talking about building something new, like big, multi-story complexes to replace a single-family home, we want to talk about that,” he said. “If there's something that needs to be done, then we'll talk about it as a group and then say, ‘Hey, let's talk to the alternan’s office’ and let’s see what’s going on and if there’s anything we can do about it.’” He said then, if the developers are having a meeting with the community, they’ll be able to speak together in a unified manner.

Secondly, and related to the first point, neighborhood relationships aid in taking action by contributing positively to residents’ perceptions that they are being taken seriously. Similar to what Jerry described, Brenda (North) said that was the reason that she ended up joining the bike-lane advocacy group she was a part of. “At the neighborhood events that I’ve gone to, the bikers have shown up in force,” she said, which encouraged her to pursue membership in the bike-lane advocacy group. Not every neighborhood relationship is based on a specific advocacy area, however. “I do think that in a city it's absolutely essential to have strong community groups,” said Stacey (North). “I think that having a collective voice is a voice that can be heard loud and strong.” She was speaking about her neighborhood association, a group whose membership doesn’t look like it will be waning anytime soon:

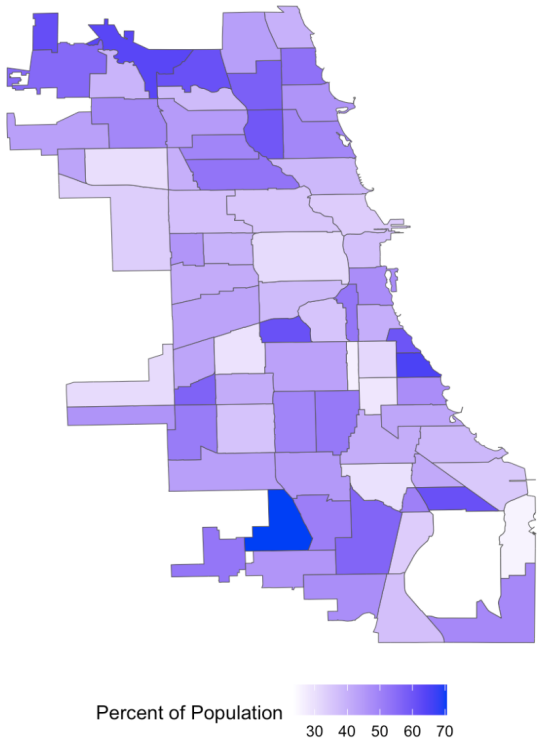
> “When advertising our neighborhood association to new members at the farmers market, we don't have any trouble selling it. Because I think that people want to be part of a group, and it's such a good organization. You're giving back, you're

having fun while you're doing it, you're with your neighbors, you have a big commonality."

Further, she explained that it helps the planners feel a sense of trust for the authority of what she's saying when she brings her thoughts and experiences to the meeting. "I think that the credibility probably lies more with being a member of the association than just coming as Stacey, an individual on X Avenue," she said. "I think that they listen to me as a member of the association, first and foremost. They trust that."

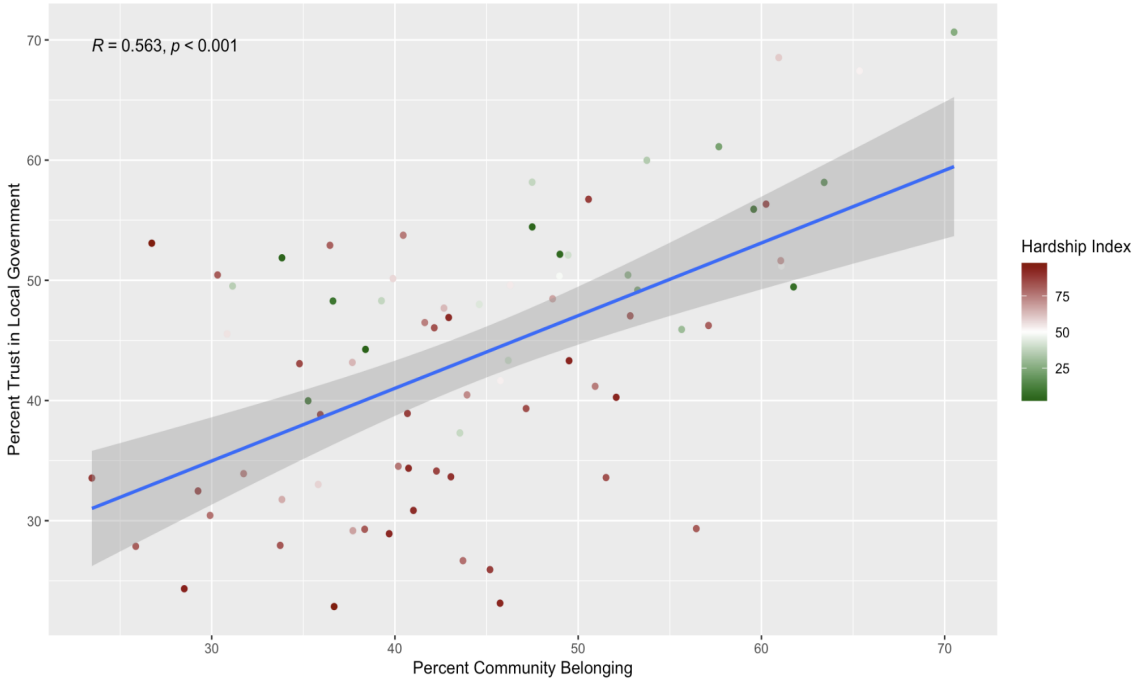
This cohesion taking place within the neighborhood as people band together to take action within their city raises the question of how the connection between neighbors might influence trust in authority figures like the local government. To examine this, I chose to operationalize data on community belonging. Community belonging is related to trust between neighbors insofar as the bonds that stem from social reciprocity embed one in the neighborhood.

Figure 18: Community Belonging Rate




First, I wanted to examine the rates of community belonging reported across the city. The average rate of community belonging for a community area in Chicago is 44.35%, and there don't appear to be any major regional differences in its distribution, as can be seen in Figure 18. Regional analysis of the average confirms this, with the average community belonging being 47%, 41%, and 44% across the North, West, and South community areas respectively. I then compared these values with the levels of trust in

Figure 19: Community Belonging vs. Local Government Trust




the local government in Figure 19, where there emerged a clear correlation between the levels of community belonging and the trust in local government. What's more, these patterns don't appear to follow Hardship Index patterns as closely as they have on other indicators. These findings, combined with interview respondents' experiences, suggest to me that when people work together to make change, they seem to stave off the negative impacts that others have experienced from the local government. Instead, unified neighborhoods feel heard and effective in their advocacy efforts with the city. It seems then, that because they can see positive outcomes from their efforts, that their trust in the systems available to make change (i.e., the local government) is strengthened. However, the average reported community belonging across the city is low (like overall average trust), meaning that the rate at which this mechanism is able to take place in Chicago is limited. These low levels of community belonging are likely stemming from the lower rates of group membership observed by Putnam (2000) and the ever-more

normalized liberation of people from community structures, but more research would be needed to fully understand this trend.

In summary, neighborhood relationships can play a large role in enhancing residents' perceived and actual influence over local developments. Strong social ties empower individuals to collectively address community issues and feel heard by developers, planners, and aldermen alike. When neighbors unite in advocacy, they not only counteract negative experiences that can hurt trust, but also strengthen their collective trust in the existing pathways for changemaking. Thus, community cohesion is essential for building participation.

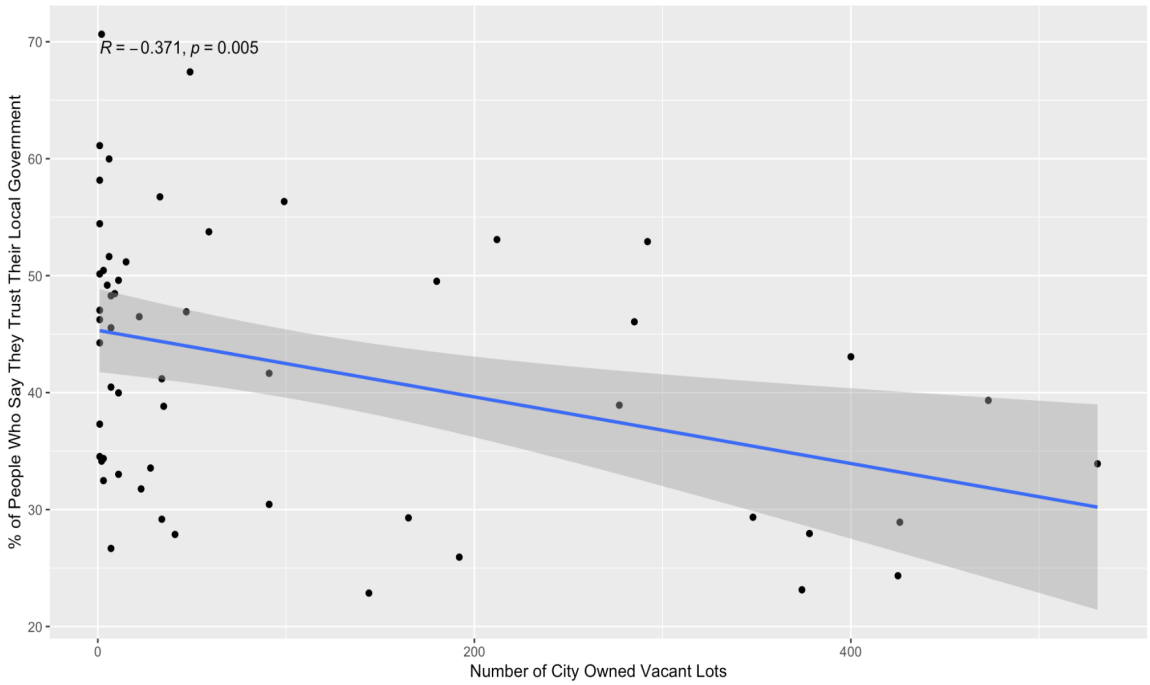
## ISSUES/INITIATIVES

I turn now to the dynamics between community trust and the actual initiatives aimed at addressing the challenges the city faces. Specifically, I examine the management of vacant lots, the roles and impact of community meetings, and the We Will Chicago initiative. These initiatives are important to study in this context because they are either directly related to or purposefully address the historical events that have led to a lack of trust among residents, and seek to engage people in ways to heal that trust. At the same time, however, they can further that mistrust if executed ineffectively. Through this exploration, I look toward how trust—or more commonly, the lack thereof—shapes residents' perceptions and interactions with these efforts: How does trust influence community engagement in community meetings and We Will Chicago? How is trust impacted by the presence of vacant lots, the efficacy of meetings, and the We Will Chicago process?

*Vacant Lots*

Before we examine initiatives, let's discuss one core physical manifestation of mistrust: vacant lots. In the previous chapter on Ownership, we discussed how vacant lots in the city contribute to a lack of ownership. Now let's examine how they impact trust. Cross-referencing the Chicago Health Atlas data on trust levels with the records the city of Chicago keeps on how

Figure 20: Vacancy vs Trust




many vacant lots it owns in each community area, Figure 20 depicts a slight correlation between the number of city-owned vacant lots in a community area and the degree of mistrust that residents within that area feel for the local government. I removed from this data the community areas of North Lawndale, New City, West Englewood, and Englewood due to their outlier status regarding the number of vacant lots reported in those areas (827, 860, 929, and 1262

respectively)[13]. For reference, the highest number of vacant owned lots held by the city in a community area just beneath these four is 531.

"The way that those properties were vacated, in some cases, is problematic, and caused a lot of displacement in communities," said Naomi (South). She talked about one street on the South side that's filled with vacant lots as an example. "There's a lot of vacant property along that corridor, because the city demolished the housing that was there twenty years ago, with the promises that it would be rebuilt and that residents will be able to return to those communities, and it still hasn't happened," she said, "There's many reasons why it hasn't happened, and this is not to point judgment, but I think it speaks to why some people lack trust with the city."

She also said that part of the trust is that, with historical issues that have caused the current vacancies (like those referenced earlier in this chapter), a lot of people forget the whole story. Instead, they're left with bits and pieces while the key perpetrator remains clear: the city leaders. "In Englewood, a lot of vacant land was demolished with the promise of rebuilding and residents returning and it didn't happen. And then it snowballs," Naomi explained, referring to the community area with the highest number of reported city-owned vacant lots. "So, you have communities depopulated, commercial corridors are impacted, local businesses can no longer sustain themselves, and you have a commercial corridor now that's just desolate."

"They don't even maintain the damn lots," Ruth (South) said, expressing her frustration about the city denying her group's attempt at taking care of a vacant lot that they were helping to steward while they did nothing to improve the area's condition for current residents, "Are you the worst slumlord ever, City of Chicago? If I buy the lot, what do they tell me? 'Oh, you've got to put a fence up.' Well, how come you aren't living by the same grade? And that doesn't come

[13] Trust in the local government in these neighborhoods was 30.9% (North Lawndale), 33.7% (New City), 43.3% (West Englewood), and 40.3% (Englewood).

across as genuine to us." Josh complained about something similar based on his experiences before being approved to buy his vacant lot. "They don't maintain it," he said. "I live in the city. Why do I have a jungle next to my house?" He told me that the lots are not mowed, the trees are not trimmed, and the properties get filled up with trash. Beyond just the lack of care from the city, he also pointed out the hypocrisy from the city. "The mayor made a big deal about people clearing their sidewalks, but there's hundreds and hundreds of city owned properties that the city doesn't clear the sidewalks on. So, the kids are walking in the street when it's time to go to school, and the city does nothing about it." This double standard that the city projects on to residents but does not follow for itself is a source of mistrust for residents.

It's evident that there is a relationship between the formation of mistrust and the prevalence of vacant lots, particularly on the South and West sides of Chicago. The existence of vacant lots and the deep historical tie to that vacancy erodes trust within the community as a signal of neglect from the city. This mistrust is multiplied when the city fails to follow through on the very rules that it attempts to enforce on others, leaving the land in disrepair.

*Community Meetings*

Amir and I took an Uber from our design firm's office in the Loop to the far South side of Chicago for a community-engagement meeting the firm was helping with. It was scheduled to take place at a local library and intended to gather resident feedback on where to place bike lanes most strategically. Our driver was friendly and quite talkative along the ride. As we approached the library, he warned us, "When you're done with your meeting, get a car and go straight home. Don't look around. This part of town is called the Wild Hundreds." He was referring to the fact that we had passed 100th street, past the last stop on the Red Line. "Most of the crime down here

is committed by these teenage kids who don't fear anything," he said. We arrived at the library early, and asked the librarian if we could head downstairs to the meeting room to start setting up.

"Your event starts at 5:30 PM?" she asked. When we confirmed the time, she shook her head, "Then you can't head down until 5:00 PM."

A man sitting at one of the nearby tables overheard us and waved us over. That is how I first met Liam, another planner hosting the community-engagement meeting. As we waited, I asked him about his work on the project. And he told me that he knew a lot about biking in South Chicago from personal experience, but that it was hard to get people to show up to express their thoughts and concerns. Liam explained that the previous night there had been another meeting for the same project in the town south of the city where only one person had shown up: the mayor; unfortunately, not enough to be considered community engagement. I asked him what number of people would be ideal and he laughed, "We take whatever we can get." According to Liam, at least as many stakeholders as planners in the room would be great, but that would be hard with the bike project since there were already eight people working on it. "20 would be amazing," he said, "40 incredible. I can't even imagine an instance where we'd come anywhere close to too many, though 100 might overcrowd the room. But if we have two people tonight…hey, that's double what we had at the last meeting."

The others arrived later, and at 5:00 PM we were allowed to head down to the basement where the event would be hosted. We walked down the stairs, passing an auditorium with a symbol on the door to remind visitors that there were no guns allowed. We all set up large maps in a circle around the room, some with data on auto and bike accidents, others with data on land use, others with data on existing bike lanes, both protected and unprotected, on which people could write or place sticky notes. Once set up, we all stood around waiting. "No one's going to

come," Liam said, cracking a joke. "I'm not hoping no one comes, I'm just preparing. Just being realistic."

In my conversation with residents and planners about their efforts to engage the community, the challenge of participation emerged again and again. The primary reason was trust, and that manifested in several ways. First, there was explicit mistrust in the people who were hosting the meeting. "As a participant, I always would avoid engagement meetings because of the trust issue," said Sofia (South). "But now that I'm an artist engaged in the community, I have a different lens on…I'm the one trying to get people to come in now. And in the organizations that I'm with, we're always discussing: what do we need to do to bring in the people who aren't showing up?"

Another manifestation of lack of trust is avoiding the engagement meetings because of poor interactions with planners in the past that made participation seem useless. For example, Madison, a resident on Chicago's south side, told me about a large problem her community faced years ago with school closures. They offered a meeting, which she attended, but did not have a great experience at. "They don't answer any questions. It's not super helpful," she said. "I remember they gave us this handout that was very fancy, it was like all in color. But they didn't bother to draw what the lines would be, for who was gonna go where. It just gave a very nice color map of the present situation. And that was it. And I was like, this is totally useless. Like, why did you waste the color printer on this?"

On the other end of the spectrum are the communities whose trust in the government leads them to contribute less, if at all. A couple of my participants explained to me this trend within the Chinese American community in Chicago. "In addition to language barriers, people tend to trust experts a lot," said Chloe. "So, when you gather residents to come give opinions

about a transportation improvement plan, or a proposed housing project, or any number of topics, people feel like they don't have anything to contribute when they're not subject matter experts. They want to defer to other people who have more knowledge or more expertise." Vera also said that was one of the biggest barriers for that community, but also in other communities where trust in experts is considered the norm. "People are used to relying on the experts to disseminate their knowledge," she said, "If you look back in Asia, there's a civil service exam. The most academically inclined and hardworking people will make the diligent decisions for society." In the US, without such a system in place, there is a need for more engagement from everyday citizens, and this barrier of trust-induced indifference must be overcome.

At the meeting I attended that night in the Wild Hundreds, people did show up. In addition to a city official, about four residents walked around our signs making notes on the boards or just reading about the proposed project and the current statistics posted. Once they left, the planners and I gathered around the table in the middle of the room talking. I mentioned my thesis, and Liam shared his own observations about the struggle of getting people in the room.

"A lot of times, those living in affordable housing won't come because the market rate folks are so loud," he chuckled. "The biggest takeaway I got from that was the importance of soundproofing." He also noted that sometimes it's a matter of availability. "When people are available adds a whole other layer to who is able to show up to these conversations." So, some lack of participation seems to come from less desirable aspects of community meetings unrelated to trust, but overall, it seems that much of the disinterest stems from an overreliance on or lack of trust in the local government and planners.

Overall, the challenges of participation at community meetings are a tangible application of the themes on resident and planner trust from earlier in this chapter. Past experiences foster a

lack of trust and dissuade some residents from trying to come out, while a culture of trust in experts can have the same effect. Some other factors, such as inconvenient meeting times and the overrepresentation of a certain perspective, can also discourage attendance, but the overwhelming reason seems to be a lack of trust in community processes.

### *We Will Chicago*

We Will Chicago was an initiative unlike any project that Chicago had done before, as the city recruited teams of knowledgeable residents and community organizers to offer their insights in addition to sending them into the city to gain more feedback. This process offers insights into the struggle that lack of trust can be in efforts to garner community feedback (even among community members), and ways creative communication can be employed to try overcoming these barriers. I first learned about We Will Chicago online, and based on the website, I arrived in Chicago thinking that most people knew what it was and had participated to some extent. I was wrong. Most of the work done for the We Will Chicago plan happened in committees–one for each of the main issue areas called pillars. To learn more about the community members who took part in this process, I watched recordings from one of the pillar's meetings. That was where I first saw and heard from Ruth (South), whose stories I have quoted extensively throughout this project. At the very first meeting, once the city officials had finished presenting and discussion began, Ruth spoke up.

"I've participated in a lot of City of Chicago initiatives," she said to those logged in, "I don't know if the City of Chicago recognizes that for those of us who are not paid city employees, this is a heavy lift. Don't get me wrong, it's great work. I feel like I have to stay here and do it, but this is a huge time commitment, emotional commitment because it pulls up all sorts

of things for us." She continued, explaining some of her own family history. "I'm a second-generation Chicagoan so I've been in Chicago for quite a long time. My family was impacted by redlining, all of that, but it's a heavy lift. And I just want to make sure the city knows when we participate in these types of things, we really do want to see outcomes and action. We are not here to just put a document together, to put some comments together that say, 'Oh yeah, we had community participation.' We are leaving our blood, sweat, and our tears at each of these gatherings and I just want the city to recognize that."

This exemplifies what other residents said during the interviews I wrote about earlier in this chapter; history has a huge impact on how much trust people are willing to put in the city and how much engagement they're willing to give. However, the people who participated in We Will Chicago's pillar meetings and strove to engage their communities were a little different. "They selected people based on a number of demographic keys and spatial keys, making sure that the whole city was represented," said William (North). "But I don't think people would have volunteered, if they were like, 'This is crap.'" He also acknowledged that there was skepticism from the group over ensuring that the work that they put in would amount to something, but participation wasn't an issue. In some cases, the more they participated, the more walls came down. What William is pointing out is that lack of trust is not an automatic disqualifier from participation, as it was still present in many of the residents participating in, We Will Chicago. Their lack of trust informed the way in which they participated in the We Will Chicago meetings but did not completely prevent their contributions. It suggests that not all mistrust has to be overcome to improve participation—just enough to get people in the room to hash it out.

"I can say there was a high degree of not trusting what we were saying at the beginning of the process," said Leo (South) who took part in a different pillar's meetings. "It led to some

awkward and uncomfortable moments…But I think that through the pillar research and the process that we had set up, it gave space to people to talk about those things. And it provided some direct interaction between city staff and people who actually had real concerns about not only that project, but you know, environmental justice issues in general. I think that really helped too: just being in conversation and being around people and talking with people and really listening to what they had to say. I think it really helps."

Outside of the pillar meetings, outreach into the community struggled with concerns about trust that they tried to overcome with more creative modes of communication and connection. Naomi, one of the artists who worked with We Will Chicago explained how they used a photography submission tool to connect with residents who they wanted to gain insight to:

> "Initially, there were probably some concerns around trust, not with the peace circles, but with the photography. I think that that initiative helped to mitigate some of the trust and to build trust. The engagement of that had a longer lead time. And the outreach around that was based on personal relationships. So, we weren't just canvassing our community blind, we were reaching out to specific people to get them to participate…And then the actual exercise of not just having people talk about the challenges or their perceptions of their community, but to be able to use photography as a tool. It engaged them differently. They had to really think about their opinions and use photography to document their concerns. And then actually doing the exhibit, sharing the images that they photographed, and having a roundtable conversation, that…also helped to reinforce the trust with us."

In some cases, these were successful, but there were still very real tensions present between the organizers trying to connect and the residents they were trying to serve. "I was told, 'Oh, you're just a pawn in this. The city is still the city. They're just using you now as a new face. They're using you,'" said Sofia (South). She explained that the city couldn't just jump in after the years of mistreatment and expect things to be different and acknowledged that it seemed the city was trying to be less bureaucratic in the We Will Chicago process, but it certainly wasn't perfect,

and trust was still a major complication. “We did what we could and the resources that we were given were limited, which didn't help either. When we were out there, a lot of people didn't know what the We Will Chicago initiative was. Even to this day…It was one thing, trying to work for it, but then try to explain what it is, instead of that being done by the city.” she said. “We thought that they would have done some kind of mass initiative, whether on TV, on the billboards, on flyers or mailers to let people know, ‘Hey, this is coming. Help out.’ But part of the problem is that communication was pretty much non-existent on all levels.”

Then, once communities were reached and participation was garnered, there were other mistakes that continued to emphasize to residents that they weren’t really being taken seriously. Adelita, who worked with the Native American communities during that process, spoke to me about her frustration about the “Native American” identity not even being included on initial post-meeting surveys with all the other racial/ethnic categories. “I was kind of embarrassed,” she said. “You want me to reach out to my neighbor, and you’re not even gonna include us on the survey. I said, ‘Don't worry, everyone. I will be in touch with them.’”

Despite the hiccups, it was clear that the desire of all the organizers was to improve the relationship between the residents they were trying to reach/represent and the rest of the city. “I think we had people that were impressed that we were being included, and that we did get to come to the table, and we did get to express our opinions,” Adelita said. “But there was frustration that, you know, we were just a few sentences here and there…There was still that frustration of, ‘It's not going to help, it's just going to be a few things on a piece of paper. That doesn't mean anything.’ But we just continue encouraging them.” Adelita knew that her community’s lack of trust in the actions of the local government was a major obstacle to their involvement, and that if they could see at least one good outcome from their participation—one

good personal experience with planners to stand against the negative histories they had been repeating to themselves over the decades—it could start to change participation patterns more permanently. “You got to stand up. We can't just keep sitting on the sidelines, just waiting for things to happen,” Adelita told them. “You have to make things happen. And that's what we're doing.”

These challenges and concerns seemed to permeate the entirety of the We Will Chicago process, including the final pillar meeting I watched. Even though I was only watching a recording of the online meeting, I could see and feel the tension within the Zoom room as the participants were told that the plan, they had created would not be going to the city council for a vote. “If this isn’t going before the council, then what’s the use of it?” Samantha asked. She and others were concerned that, much like the lack of continuity pointed out by my interviewees at the start of this chapter, that once new elected officials took office, all their work would have been for nothing unless it was made official through a vote in the city council.

“The recognition is that of course there are always more groups that we should be making an effort to engage with, especially around specific topics or ideas,” said Marco, one of the city professionals who was tasked with moderating the We Will Chicago pillar discussion. “We just want to make sure we’re doing our due diligence by reaching communities that are either excluded, have been excluded from processes, or that would be most impacted by those specific policy issues.” Marco was expressing concerns that city leaders had with the erosion of trust that might occur among residents who felt left out of We Will Chicago after it’s official conclusion. As well-meaning as it may have been, this concern failed to recognize the more relevant erosion of trust that failing to act on the work that had already been done would have among residents who *did* participate.

Samantha, a resident from the South side, was not satisfied with his answer. “Your explanation didn’t help, because what I said still stands,” she replied. “You all knew. This was an extensive process to choose who participated. You chose who participated. You should have chosen members of these ‘various groups’ from the start.” She continued, as others on the call nodded along. “I was getting pushback from my community for giving input because they said this very thing would happen. And now I have to go and go back and say ‘Well, they’re not going to put it through to [City Council]’ and have them say ‘I told you.’” Ultimately, she is saying that the social networks (and trust) that she leveraged to get feedback for the city may now be harmed by the city's trust-breaking tendency to not follow through on what they say.

Samantha laughed, “It feels a little frustrating to try and convince someone that the process works when you get this sort of thing.”

Marco nodded, saying that he would bring that feedback to his superiors. Just before they moved on, Samantha said, “And one last thing: you have to stand on what you say. You can’t keep moving the goal post because that fosters mistrust.” If the city wasn’t going to adhere to the plan, it would instead be another major personal experience that residents would use to justify their lack of trust in planners and the local government, further harming the already very small amount of relational trust built through the course of the project.

The We Will Chicago Plan was eventually passed by the Council, assuaging the participants' fears, but the concerns of Samantha and the other organizers still resound, along with the concerns of other residents I spoke with across the city; trust is incredibly difficult to build, and the initiatives with the most potential for good also seem to have the most potential for harm.

We Will Chicago's full effect on trust has yet to be seen because it is still early in the process of implementation, but it has the potential to either help or hurt city-wide trust. On the one hand it could improve trust levels, by normalizing creative forms of engagement with communities that have been otherwise left alone for so long. On the other hand, it could further sink already prevalent mistrust by not following through on its promises or getting bogged down in additional planning measures that reinforce the prevailing idea many residents have: getting involved is a waste of time. Challenges We Will Chicago experienced in communication and representation have highlighted the delicate balance between fostering hope and reinforcing skepticism, but community organizers seem to remain hopeful and committed to continue working for their neighborhoods.

**SUMMARY**

This chapter examines the ways in which trust influences the ways residents choose to take action in shaping the physical spaces they inhabit and how trust is then impacted by that participation or the initiatives of the city. First, trust is generally low across the city, but particularly in areas with higher levels of Hardship. Historical experiences of disenfranchisement and the action (or inaction) of aldermen create a mountain of evidence against the city that even positive interactions can't completely negate. A similar problem persists regarding trust in planners, but planners are well aware of this issue and tend to focus on counteracting it. This focus, however, has created a neglect for the other side of the equation: planners' trusting residents. Trust is, at its finest, a two-way relationship and this finding highlights a critical hit in the efforts of building trust within the urban planning discipline. Across both these sections and across both planners and residents the need for transparency, genuine communication, and

honesty regarding limitations was shared. When considering how these groups envisioned the approach to build trust, residents once again focused on transparency, while planners employed tactics to make themselves more relatable, and both emphasized a need for the expression of tangible results. Next, I look toward trust and relationships within the neighborhood as a means of change making. Strong social networks empower residents to collectively address community issues, contributing to a sense of being heard and effective advocacy, especially in the context of low trust in the local government and planners. This cohesion might mitigate the negative experiences people have with local government and be an avenue for increasing trust, as indicated by the correlation between community belonging and trust in the local government.

Finally, we examine how trust is acted upon and formed within the context of some of Chicago's initiatives. Poor experiences that people have had with community meetings dissuade them from coming and indicate to them that it is an ineffective way of advocating for the changes they want to see. Conversely, some communities feel that since they aren't experts, there's nothing of value for them to add. These are both perspectives that led the city to want to develop We Will Chicago. While there were clear efforts through, We Will to improve trust, and community organizers worked hard to get the contributions of their neighbors, it also highlighted how easily a project that makes promises to the community can lead to further mistrust through poor communication. Community organizers can provide a unique perspective to planners because their roles are almost entirely centered around engagement and feedback, while it is only a part of the planner's role. Those who worked on We Will Chicago specifically have even more unique insights because many of them are residents in the communities commonly neglecting to take part in engagement efforts due to lack of trust. Community areas that have been divested in, particularly on the South and West sides, don't trust the city, even with initiatives that directly

state they want their input. The persistence of vacant lots in these regions and the city's inability to keep them clean are a continual, tangible reminder that the city does not care about them and is not effective, keeping the spirit of mistrust alive.

In the next chapter, I will synthesize the past three findings chapters, examine their sociological significance in the context of current literature available on these topics, and why these findings matter for the future of Chicago and community-engaged planning generally.

# DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

While I have examined demographics, ownership, and trust separately throughout this thesis, all three sets of factors intertwine to influence community engagement in urban planning. We will discuss those findings in the context of relevant literature and expand on how these findings align with or contribute to the field of urban sociology and our understanding of community-engaged urban planning. Finally, based on these findings, I have drawn up a few policy recommendations that could be implemented in the city of Chicago and other cities striving to heal previous wounds and increase resident engagement in planning.

## MAIN FINDINGS

I will review the findings discussed in the past three chapters. Hardship was found to vary significantly by race, and negatively impact trust that residents had in the city's ability to work in their best interests. Interviews further identified that low trust in the city tends to be shaped by negative historical experiences, especially along racial or ethnic lines, and personal experiences. Upon further investigation, it became clear that how many different wards a community area is divided into does not necessarily impact the level of trust in that community area, nor does racial hegemony within a community area impact the levels of trust or sense of community belonging reported. People generally expect things to go wrong when it comes to working with the city, and projects like We Will Chicago that are aimed at improving trust can also have further negative effects due to existing skepticism. This can also happen at community meetings, where people may either assume because of their lack of expertise that they have nothing to add or have bad experiences that indicate it is an ineffective way for them to make the changes they want to see. This inefficiency can turn residents toward methods of changemaking that cut out the city

altogether, like DIY planning. This is a means for people who feel a sense of ownership over their neighborhood and have the social networks in their neighborhood necessary to act on it.

Residents defined that sense of ownership based on investment (financial and temporal), social cohesion, and change making ability. I found that strong social networks empowered residents to collectively address community issues. While change making ability was a large part of what led residents to describe themselves as having a sense of ownership over their neighborhood, planners (who have the most change making ability) refrained from referring to their feelings about their role in planning as ones related to "ownership," instead indicating that they felt a sense of responsibility or investment instead. Beyond the mere presence or absence of ownership, there were also two kinds of ownership referenced: communal ownership and individual ownership. communal ownership came from access to and care for public spaces, while individual ownership involved shaping personal property.

One issue that highlighted the difference between property types is graffiti. Interviewees reported that they considered it inappropriate on private property, sometimes wrong on communal property—due to an overextension of personal ownership on the space, and generally okay or even amusing in areas owned by "no one." Observations made about renters contributing less to efforts to improve the community was found to be less rooted in the lack of permanent financial investment, and more tied to the lack of temporal investment. Renters who lived in their neighborhoods for long periods of time seemed to be perceived similarly to those who were homeowners in their participation. There were also more logistical and infrastructural hurdles to integrating renters recently moving to the neighborhood into the fabric of collective efficacy.

Vacant land highlights for residents the lack of ownership and historical wrongdoings that make up their perception of mistrust in a very physical and visible way. Programs that try to

heal these issues can end up reinforcing those negative feelings if applications are denied or residents' idea for how things should go doesn't work out.

## DISCUSSION

Overall, trust and sense of ownership are both formed through a combination of personal experiences with social interactions between residents and neighbors, authority figures, and others, as well as passed down narratives about significant historical interactions between more broadly defined groups of people (such as racial/ethnic groups or community areas). On one hand, this places some burden on the city to solve issues in the quality-of-life factors that deter residents from taking part in the process of participation and the lack within the opportunities currently available for residents to contribute to community development initiatives. On the other hand, it suggests that there is also a burden upon communities to address misconceptions and the mindset of remaining in the hurt of history that delay participation and social efficacy. Updating our understanding of how these concepts work within the city regarding urban planning could help, and my findings affirm, refine, and engage with the literature on these subjects in many interesting ways.

My findings that hardship varies with trust supports Putnam's (2000) assertion that trust is higher in more privileged communities and demonstrates that the patterns persist today. My use of the Brookings Hardship Index for my study also confirms Putnam's finding that this difference in trust among socioeconomically disadvantaged populations is not a matter of perception but differences in their lived experiences—further built upon by interviewees explanations that drew on negative historical experiences (rather than personal perceptions related to subjective experiences like racism or sexism). Chicago's strong correlation between

race and hardship further enhances this difference beyond mere socioeconomic differences. While Jane Jacobs (1961) explains that there can be issues when there are multiple street neighborhoods competing for power within the district, I found that reported levels of trust in the city and community belonging were not impacted by how many ward divisions a community area had.

When it comes to forming trust, Rousseau's conceptualization still offers a useful lens through which to see the stories told in this thesis. Calculus-based trust, based on "credible information regarding the intentions or competence of another,' and relational trust, from "repeated interactions over time," in which, "reliability and dependability…give rise to positive expectations" come together to form institution-based trust. In resident testimonies, calculus trust was impeded based on a lack of transparency and relational trust based on repetitions of poor experiences. The problem of "rigidity in response" was also reflected in resident experiences, where the government either moved too slowly or operated in a way that seemed unfair (in the examples related to vacant lots).

Planners' reluctance to categorize their role as one of ownership resonates with their tendency to categorize their work as mediation and administration, as well as their tendency to not be asked about their role and the values that underpin it (Fox-Rogers and Murphy 2016). Meanwhile, residents' sense of ownership expressed in this study clarifies the definition offered by Lachapelle (2008) and affirms his assertion that a degree of control is necessary for residents to develop any sense of ownership. The persistence of communal ownership within smaller neighborhood units within the city counters the ideas of Durkheim and Tonnies (1972) that communal ownership wouldn't persist in urban environments. Socially constructed signs of

disorder, such as graffiti, further affirm these differences in people's perceptions of property types in the city (Sampson 2012).

Renters' lack of involvement coming back to lack of financial ties and lowered integration with the rest of the community (McCabe 2013) was also reflected in my study, however my interviews reflect that it has less to do with the lowered financial investment and more to do with the lowered temporal investment.

These findings combined with the existing literature about urban sociology help us to better understand the way residents form their sense of ownership and trust, which can be foundational to so many relationships within the city. In terms of concrete steps that can be taken to improve some of the relationships at play in urban planning, I have a few policy suggestions outlined in the section below.

## POLICY SUGGESTIONS

If efforts to reverse the negative impacts that historical urban planning has had on community trust and sense of ownership so often accidentally reinforce residents' negative perceptions, are they worth continuing to pursue? The answer is a resounding yes. As this research has demonstrated, despite the mistrust and challenges to engagement, there is still hope from residents who wish to engage with the city in shaping their communities; their participation has the potential to ensure that cities are made for residents to thrive rather than just survive in. Therefore, I have some policy suggestions that the city of Chicago and other cities that seek to address these issues within their community, could adopt to better address the challenges outlined in this research.

- *Increase Communal Ownership Opportunities:* Current policies that draw a sharp line between vacant land that can be sold and vacant land that is waiting for a greater purpose miss out on partnering with the residents who are interested in beautifying their community in the present. Rather than banning for sale land that alderman want to eventually use, short term leases where both parties understand the land use will be re-evaluated after some time would create more opportunities for communal land ownership in communities on the South and West sides that are underrepresented in public parks and overrepresented in underused and "no one owns" land. This provides more opportunities for communal and personal ownership to be formed. It also can improve trust by reducing the number of visual reminders residents have about the city's previous failures and presents an opportunity for the city to communicate transparently with residents.
- *Centralize Information Sharing:* Some aldermen have websites, some have Facebook pages, some have mailing lists, and some have nothing. On top of that, many relics from previous administrations remain online, and the same is true for smaller neighborhood organizations. Altogether, the landscape of information for residents who are interested in getting involved or providing feedback to the city is quite confusing. The city should seek to centralize information sharing from aldermen to their constituents to make it less confusing for residents to get involved, especially those that are new to the area. This will resonate with residents' desire for increased transparency, and potentially increase trust. Increasing residents' knowledge of engagement efforts could also increase turnout at these events and improve individual sense of ownership over the neighborhood.
- *Partner with Apartment Complexes:* What if renting residents, as a part of the paperwork they receive when moving to a new apartment, were informed of the local neighborhood

organizations and ways that the alderman communicates with people in that ward? If relationships like these were pursued and established by community organizers and the city council members, it would overcome one of the major barriers described by residents I spoke with regarding challenges to renters' contribution. This would be even easier to do if information was centralized, as recommended above.

- *Innovate New Methods of Contribution:* Once ownership and trust are addressed, there is still the issue of accessibility. While there are now often opportunities for residents to hop on a Zoom call to learn about what's happening in their neighborhood and contribute feedback, which is an improvement on the accessibility of previously solely in-person meetings, there is still room to expand the methods available for residents to contribute. For example, residents that work hours that prevent them from joining a Zoom call or in-person community meeting, may benefit from online, asynchronous forums for contribution and discussion. The innovation of new methods like these could lead to more residents regularly sharing their feedback on small initiatives happening around them.

## LIMITATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This thesis offers an insightful starting point for further academic research into how we can create better cities through improved methods of community engagement in urban planning, however there were a few limitations that could be improved upon in future studies. First, because I went through ward aldermen mailing lists to recruit a significant number of my interviewees, and also recruited some others through recommendation, it means my participants tended to be either in the know about the available ways to get involved or had at least some form of social network. This means that the perspectives of those who have absolutely no

involvement or knowledge of what the city is working on are underrepresented in this study. This limits the generalizability of the study's findings to the experiences of those likely to be involved, as opposed to those who would rarely or never be engaged.

Furthermore, reaching out to residents through aldermen meant that the majority of people responding to my invitation to interview were individuals living in wards where the alderman was responsive, and these wards tended to be on the North side. Overall, the perspectives of those who lived on the North side of the city were represented more in my sample than the perspectives of those on the South or West sides. Therefore, the responses are, on average, likely oriented toward the North's attitudes: slightly more trusting, slightly more communal (in terms of ownership), and slightly less prone to hardship.

Studies in the future would benefit from finding ways to study the perspectives of those who would never participate regardless of what improved systems are put into place. Do their ideas of ownership and trust vary significantly from those I was able to contact? It might also be beneficial to uncover the degrees to which different types of action and involvement influence residents' further involvement. For example, does DIY action lead to someone participating in more community meetings more often than participation in a vacant lot land acquisition? On the side of urban planners, a study that is able to more broadly study the practices of this career and their interactions with the public would benefit further adaptations to the education of future urban planners, considering the development of sense of ownership and trust established in this thesis.

## FINAL REMARKS

The city acts like a living entity, composed of smaller communities and even smaller individuals. It belongs to us, and in a way, we belong to it. There's a unique beauty in being part of something that's larger than ourselves. If there is anything my research has revealed, it's that cities reach their fullest potential only when the people who make up the city are engaged and feel empowered to make it their own. Cities are more than just spaces where we reside; they are the backdrop for our collective narratives. Trust, a sense of ownership, belonging, and active participation are critical in transforming urban spaces from mere locations to vibrant, inclusive communities. It's through this synergy that cities can truly prosper, evolving into places that mirror our shared dreams and aspirations.

This work is a call to action. Not just for the city to create better pathways for residents to contribute, but for all city inhabitants to engage with and shape the urban spaces we inhabit. It's only through our collective action that we can build cities that are not just habitable, but that inspire and unite us. Let's commit to this collective endeavor, inspired by the belief that together, we can create urban environments that embody our shared dreams and highest aspirations. It's in the concerted efforts of its residents that a city finds its spirit, showcasing the transformative power of community in defining the essence of urban life. If we take hold the key of trust, and turn the handle of ownership, we can unlock the door to cities that resonate with this dream of collective placemaking. Turn the key. Open the future.

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# APPENDIX I: INTERVIEW GUIDE

**Opening**

1. What does it mean to you to have ownership over your neighborhood?
    a. Do you feel like you have ownership over your neighborhood?
        i. Why/why not? (get concrete examples)
    b. Where does this feeling come from for you? How do you know that you have ownership over your neighborhood?
    c. What strengthens your feelings of ownership?
    d. What damages or diminishes it?
2. Are you a renter or owner?
3. Is your community mostly renters or owners?
    a. Do you notice a difference in engagement between them? /Have you ever experienced any challenges being involved?

**For Planners**

4. Why did you decide to go into this kind of work?
5. Do you feel a sense of ownership over the communities that you work in?
    a. How do you think that impacts the way you work?
6. In your work as a planner, what does it mean to you to trust residents?
    a. In what ways do you not trust residents?
7. What are your thoughts on DIY action—is it good for the community?
8. What kind of impact do you feel your role as a planner has on how you engage with your own community outside of work?

**For Community Meetings**

9. Tell me about your experience with community meetings.

a. Who hosted the meeting?

b. How did you feel about the format?

10. How would you describe the type of person who shows up to and participates usefully in these meetings?
11. Have you ever had a negative experience at these meetings?

a. What made it that way?

b. How did it make you feel?

c. How did/will that impact your future engagement?

12. What makes a good experience at a community meeting?
13. What does it mean to you to trust planners/local government officials?
14. How do you know when planners/local government officials trust you?
15. How do you think these meetings impact your sense of ownership?

a. Do you think the rest of your community is impacted in a similar way?

**For 311**

16. Tell me about your experience using 311.
17. What determines what you call 311 about versus what you just ignore or what you deal with yourself?

**For We Will Chicago (WWC)**

18. How did you hear about WWC?
19. Why did you decide to take part in the way that you did?

a. For those who submitted a comment online, why not more?

b. For those who were volunteer leaders, why not less?

20. What life experiences do you think most shaped your motivations for getting involved and the feedback that you provided during the process?
    a. Which do you think was the bigger motivator for you: satisfaction with your community and wanting to protect or see it get even better OR dissatisfaction with your community and wanting to see it change?
21. What was your biggest personal takeaway from the process?
22. Now that it's over, do you think you've been left with more, the same, or less trust for your city's government?
    a. Why?
    b. Do you think this will impact how you engage with them in the future?
23. How do you think WWC impacted community trust in local government/planners?
24. How does this style of city planning impact a sense of ownership?
25. There are some people that don't even realize this happened. Why do you think that is? Is that a problem?

**For ChiBlockBuilder (CBB)/Large Lots Program**

26. Have you heard of the Large Lots/CBB?
    a. Do you know anyone who has gone through it?
    b. What are your impressions of the program?
27. How did you hear about the ChiBlockBuilder/Dollar Lot Program?
28. Why did you decide to apply?
    a. What life experiences do you think most shaped your motivations for getting involved?

b. Was there anything about the way that it was advertised to you that influenced your decision to apply?

29. Why did you make the request that you did?
30. What was your experience with the process for application (and approval, in the case of LLP)
    a. Were there any aspects of the process that you found limiting?
    b. Were there any aspects of the process that you found liberating?
    c. (if also participated in LLP) How would you compare CBB and LLP in terms of the application process and the land that was available?
        i. If they don't say "better" or "worse", then you can ask, "Was one better than the other? Why?"
    d. Were you satisfied with the lots that were listed for sale? Were there lots that weren't listed for sale that you wished had been?
    e. Did you find the pricing restrictive (either the initial purchase or the additional property taxes)?
31. If you could change the process in any way, what changes would you make?
32. Was gentrification a concern for you while you were making your request? How did it influence your decision to participate or the nature of your request.
    a. Did they influence your decision to participate and the nature of your request?
33. Has the process impacted your relationship with the government?
    a. Why?
    b. Do you think this will impact how you engage with them in the future?

34. How has this process impacted your sense of ownership in your community? Why do you think that it has had this impact?

**For DIY Action**

35. How did you get started in this kind of neighborhood action?
36. Why did you decide to take part in it the way that you did?
37. What life experiences do you think most shaped your motivations for getting involved and specific actions you took?
    a. Which do you think was the bigger motivator for you: satisfaction with your community and wanting to protect or see it get even better OR dissatisfaction with your community and wanting to see it change?
38. What has been your biggest personal takeaway from the process?
39. Does asking permission change the nature/impact of the project in terms of how it impacts the community?
    a. In other words, is there a difference that you see in a situation where the government granted you access to do something versus you taking control when the tangible outcome is the same?
40. Is DIY action something that everyone should pursue?
    a. What do you think makes someone qualified to take action in an area without permission (demographically or skill/motivation-wise)
41. How has this process impacted your sense of ownership in your community? Why do you think that it has had this impact?
42. How has your DIY engagement impacted your view of city-mediated actions or community-engaged planning?

a. Do you think they are effective modes of community contribution?

b. Who should participate in them, if anyone?

43.

**Other**

44. Is there a lot of graffiti in your area?

a. Why do you think that is?

45. What does the presence of graffiti mean/indicate to you?

a. How do you feel when you see it?

46. What you encountered any vacant lots in your area?

a. How do these impact your community?

47. Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you would like to share?

# APPENDIX II: RECRUITMENT SURVEY

**Introduction and Privacy Statement**

**Shaping Chicago: Study Overview and Consent Form**

*Key Information: The following is a short summary of this study to help you decide whether or not you want to take part. More detailed information is available at the link provided.*

**Why am I being invited to take part in a research study?** We invite you to take part in a research study because either as a resident or planner, you have played a role in shaping this city through either the We Will Chicago initiative, the Large Lots Program, ChiBlock Builder, or some other form of engagement/action.

**What should I know about a research study?**

- Someone will explain this research study to you.
- Whether or not you take part is up to you.
- Your participation is completely voluntary.
- You can choose not to take part.
- You can agree to take part and later change your mind.
- Your decision will not be held against you.
- Your refusal to participate will not result in any consequences or any loss of benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.
- You can ask all the questions you want before you decide.

**Why is this research being done?** Existing research is divided on the impact

of community-engagement in city planning, and there is a lack of research addressing how different forms of engagement or action influence one another among residents. This research project seeks to explore how the sense of ownership that community members feel over their neighborhoods and the level of trust they have in the city influenced by the community-engaged planning process (We Will Chicago) compares to other forms of engagement, such as city-mediated (Large Lots Program/ChiBlockBuilder) or DIY (guerilla greening) action? Does participation in one influence the experience with others, and how are their outcomes perceived? How do these processes impact planners' perceptions of ownership and trust of citizens, both within their role as a planner and as citizens within their own neighborhoods?

**How long will the research last and what will I need to do?** We expect that you will be in this research study for no more than an hour and 15 minutes. The survey should take around 15 minutes to complete. The interview, which is optional upon completion of the survey, should take about 1 hour. You will be asked to complete a survey regarding your experiences with community-engaged planning, city-mediated action, and DIY action, as well as some basic demographic information. If you are interested in further helping this study through an interview, you can indicate that at the end of the survey. During the interview, you will be asked more in depth questions regarding your involvement in shaping the city of Chicago and the feelings it has brought up for you.

**Is there any way being in this study could be bad for me?** We don't believe there are any risks from participating in this research.

**Will being in this study help me in any way?** While there are no concrete benefits to you from your taking part in this research, this study will give you an opportunity to share your perspectives and experiences with the current available avenues for residents to take part in shaping their city. We cannot promise any benefits to others from your taking part in this research, but it is

possible that your insights contribute to future policy changes that better serve residents and create more inclusive communities.

**What happens if I do not want to be in this research?** Participation in research is completely voluntary. You can decide to participate, not participate, or discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Click here to review more detailed information about the study, along with its timeline and various components:
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1YsQRU9RGB-rMmp8NRUfAbe-lPHv4nFHu/edit?usp=sharing&ouid=114695863600549638366&rtpof=true&sd=true

By typing your name and the date below, you are acknowledging that you have read the above information about the study and are giving your permission for your responses to be used in the manner described by these documents for the study described.

Name

Date

**Demographics (part 1)**

Name

Email

Age (please enter a whole numeric value)

Are you of Hispanic, Latino, or Spanish origin?

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ Prefer not to answer

How would you describe yourself? (select all that apply)

- ☐ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ☐ Asian
- ☐ Black or African American
- ☐ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- ☐ White
- ☐ Other
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

What is the highest degree or level of school you have completed? (If you're currently enrolled in school, please indicate the highest degree you have received.)

- ○ Less than a high school diploma
- ○ High school degree or equivalent
- ○ Some college, no degree
- ○ Associate degree
- ○ Bachelor's degree
- ○ Master's degree

- ◯ Professional degree
- ◯ Doctorate
- ◯ Prefer not to answer

What is your current employment status? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Employed full time (40+ hours per week)
- ☐ Employed part time (up to 39 hours per week)
- ☐ Unemployed and currently looking for work
- ☐ Unemployed and not currently looking for work
- ☐ Student
- ☐ Retired
- ☐ Homemaker
- ☐ Self-employed
- ☐ Unable to work
- ☐ Prefer not to answer

What is your household income?

- ◯ Less than $25,000
- ◯ $25,000 - $49,999
- ◯ $50,000 - $74,999
- ◯ $75,000 - $99,999
- ◯ $100,000 - $124,999
- ◯ $125,000 - $149,999
- ◯ $150,000 - $174,999
- ◯ $175,000 - $199,999
- ◯ $200,000+
- ◯ Prefer not to answer

Does this statement apply to you?
"I work as an urban planner/landscape architect for a private company or a government official involved in city planning or community engagement."

- ○ Yes
- ○ No
- ○ [ ] Other (please explain)

**Geographic Data**

How long have you lived in Chicago?

- ◯ 0-11 months
- ◯ 1-3 years
- ◯ 4-6 years
- ◯ 7-9 years
- ◯ 10+ years, but not for the majority of my life
- ◯ 10+ years, the majority of my life

What neighborhood do you currently live in? (based on the map provided at the top of this page)

- ◯ Rogers Park
- ◯ Edgewater
- ◯ Lincoln Square
- ◯ Uptown
- ◯ North Center
- ◯ Roscoe Village
- ◯ Lakeview
- ◯ Lincoln Park
- ◯ Old Town
- ◯ Gold Coast
- ◯ River North
- ◯ Streeterville
- ◯ Forest Glen / Jefferson Park
- ◯ Albany Park
- ◯ Portage Park
- ◯ Irving Park
- ◯ Avondale
- ◯ Logan Square

- ◯ Bucktown & Wicker Park
- ◯ Humboldt Park
- ◯ West Town
- ◯ West Loop
- ◯ Little Italy / University Village
- ◯ Pilsen
- ◯ Bridgeport & Armour Square
- ◯ Bronzeville
- ◯ South Loop
- ◯ Hyde Park & Kenwood
- ◯ South Shore
- ◯ Beverly
- ◯ Prefer not to answer

Have you always lived in the neighborhood that you selected?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No, lived in one other neighborhood
- ◯ No, lived in two other neighborhoods
- ◯ No, lived in more than two other neighborhoods
- ◯ Prefer not to answer


If you selected an option other than "Yes" to the previous question, please select all other neighborhoods that you've lived in (based on the map provided) (select all that apply).

- [ ] Rogers Park
- [ ] Edgewater
- [ ] Lincoln Square
- [ ] Uptown
- [ ] North Center
- [ ] Roscoe Village
- [ ] Lakeview

- [ ] Lincoln Park
- [ ] Old Town
- [ ] Gold Coast
- [ ] River North
- [ ] Streeterville
- [ ] Forest Glen / Jefferson Park
- [ ] Albany Park
- [ ] Portage Park
- [ ] Irving Park
- [ ] Avondale
- [ ] Logan Square
- [ ] Bucktown & Wicker Park
- [ ] Humboldt Park
- [ ] West Town
- [ ] West Loop
- [ ] Little Italy / University Village
- [ ] Pilsen
- [ ] Bridgeport & Armour Square
- [ ] Bronzeville
- [ ] South Loop
- [ ] Hyde Park & Kenwood
- [ ] South Shore
- [ ] Beverly

**Involvement Categorization**

Please rate your overall sense of neighborhood ownership on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being no ownership and 10 being a lot of ownership,

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being no degree and 10 being a very large degree, please rate your degree of trust in city government officials or planners to take action that benefits your neighborhood.

Please select all of the following that you have participated in (select all that apply)

- [ ] We Will Chicago
- [ ] Land Lots Program
- [ ] ChiBlockBuilder
- [ ] Calling 311
- [ ] DIY city improvement (any improvement for which you did not first seek city permission. Examples include public art, gardening an area not your property, providing/building/fixing a piece of infrastructure, etc.)
- [ ] Contributed feedback or participated in a community engagement meeting on city infrastructure
- [ ] None of the above

**We Will Chicago**

This set of questions refers to participation in the We Will Chicago Plan

How did you engage with the We Will Chicago (WWC) Plan? (select all that apply)

- [ ] Submitted an online comment
- [ ] Participated in a focus group
- [ ] Volunteer
- [ ] Led a community discussion
- [ ] Took part in a research team
- [ ] Participated in artist engagement
- [ ] _____ Other

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being horrible and 10 being amazing, how would you rate your experience taking part in the WWC process?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very difficult and 10 being very easy, how would you rate the ease with which you were able to take part in this form of engagement?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being insignificant and 10 being very essential, how would you rate the difference your participation had in this process?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being none and 10 being monumental, how would you rate the impact your involvement in WWC had on your community?

What words would you use to describe how participating in WWC made you feel? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Disgust
- ☐ Frustration
- ☐ Resentment

- [ ] Fear
- [ ] Shock
- [ ] Nervous
- [ ] Unease
- [ ] Cheerful
- [ ] Satisfied
- [ ] Hopeful
- [ ] Pride
- [ ] Enthusiasm
- [ ] Compassion
- [ ] Sentimental
- [ ] Disappointment
- [ ] Alienation
- [ ] Rejection
- [ ] Surprised
- [ ] Unity
- [ ] Kinship
- [ ] Indifference

If you would like to elaborate on the previous questions, you may do so here (free form)

**City-Mediated Action**

This set of questions refers to the Large Lots Program and/or ChiBlockBuilder

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being horrible and 10 being amazing, how would you rate your experience taking part in the vacant lot application process? (enter whole numeric value)

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very difficult and 10 being very easy, how would you rate the ease with which you were able to take part in this form of engagement?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being none and 10 being monumental, how would you rate the impact your action had on your community?

What words would you use to describe how participating in this process made you feel? (select all that apply)

- [ ] Disgust
- [ ] Frustration
- [ ] Resentment
- [ ] Fear
- [ ] Shock
- [ ] Nervous
- [ ] Unease
- [ ] Cheerful
- [ ] Satisfied
- [ ] Hopeful
- [ ] Pride
- [ ] Enthusiasm
- [ ] Compassion
- [ ] Sentimental
- [ ] Disappointment
- [ ] Alienation
- [ ] Rejection
- [ ] Surprised
- [ ] Unity
- [ ] Kinship
- [ ] Indifference

If you would like to elaborate on the previous questions, you may do so here (free form)

Please select the option that best describes the new use of your lot.

- ◯ Affordable Housing
- ◯ Side Yard
- ◯ Market Rate Housing
- ◯ Open Space/Community Garden
- ◯ Commercial Building
- ◯ _____ Other

**Calling 311**

This set of questions refers to Calling 311

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being horrible and 10 being amazing, how would you rate your experience engaging with the city's 311 service?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very difficult and 10 being very easy, how would you rate the ease with which you were able to take part in this form of engagement?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being none and 10 being monumental, how would you rate the impact your action had on your community?

What words would you use to describe how engaging with the 311 process made you feel? (select all that apply)

- [ ] Disgust
- [ ] Frustration
- [ ] Resentment
- [ ] Fear
- [ ] Shock
- [ ] Nervous
- [ ] Unease
- [ ] Cheerful
- [ ] Satisfied
- [ ] Hopeful
- [ ] Pride
- [ ] Enthusiasm
- [ ] Compassion
- [ ] Sentimental
- [ ] Disappointment
- [ ] Alienation

- [ ] Rejection
- [ ] Surprised
- [ ] Unity
- [ ] Kinship
- [ ] Indifference

If you would like to elaborate on the previous questions, you may do so here (free form)

Please select the option(s) that best describes your experience with the 311 process

- [ ] I was satisfied with the speed the city addressed my concern, and the way in which it was addressed
- [ ] I was satisfied with the speed of the response, but don't think it was adequately addressed
- [ ] My concern was adequately addressed but it took too long for the city to respond
- [ ] My concerns were never addressed by the city after I reported them
- [ ] I have reported the same concern to 311 several times and it still has not been addressed
- [ ] The city's lack of efficiency has made me wonder if I could/want to fix the issue myself
- [ ] I have taken it upon myself to fix an issue in my neighborhood rather than calling 311
- [ ] I have taken it upon myself to fix a neighborhood issue after there was no follow-through from 311
- [ ] 311 is a good system for getting problems in my neighborhood fixed
- [ ] 311 is a poor system for getting problems in my neighborhood fixed
- [ ] 311 needs significant improvements, but has potential to become a good system for getting problems in my neighborhood fixed

**Community Meeting Feedback**

This set of questions refers to participation in a community meeting about infrastructure in your neighborhood or other kinds of feedback to your city/neighborhood

How did you provide your feedback to the city/your ward/your neighborhood? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Submitted an online comment
- ☐ Participated in a focus group
- ☐ Took part in a research team
- ☐ Attended a meeting
- ☐ _____ Other

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being horrible and 10 being amazing, how would you rate your overall experience taking part in this process?


On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being insignificant and 10 being very essential, how would you rate the difference your participation had in this process?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very difficult and 10 being very easy, how would you rate the ease with which you were able to take part in this form of engagement?

Do you feel that this is an effective way for residents to shape their communities? (Select the option that best captures your feelings)

- ◯ Yes!
- ◯ It's sufficient.
- ◯ It's alright, but I wish residents had more direct control.
- ◯ No, but there are no better ways.
- ◯ No, and there are better ways that could be employed.
- ◯ _____ Other

What words would you use to describe how providing feedback made you feel? (select all that apply)

- ☐ Disgust

- [ ] Frustration
- [ ] Resentment
- [ ] Fear
- [ ] Shock
- [ ] Nervous
- [ ] Unease
- [ ] Cheerful
- [ ] Satisfied
- [ ] Hopeful
- [ ] Pride
- [ ] Enthusiasm
- [ ] Compassion
- [ ] Sentimental
- [ ] Disappointment
- [ ] Alienation
- [ ] Rejection
- [ ] Surprised
- [ ] Unity
- [ ] Kinship
- [ ] Indifference

If you would like to elaborate on the previous questions, you may do so here (free form)

**DIY Action**

This set of questions refers to DIY community actions.

Select the type of DIY city improvement you have engaged with

- [ ] Community gardening
- [ ] Public art
- [ ] Infrastructure repair/building
- [ ] Other

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being very difficult and 10 being very easy, how would you rate the ease with which you were able to take part in DIY engagement?

On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being none and 10 being monumental, how would you rate the impact your action had on your community?

What words would you use to describe how participating in this process made you feel? (select all that apply)

- [ ] Disgust

- [ ] Frustration
- [ ] Resentment
- [ ] Fear
- [ ] Shock
- [ ] Nervous
- [ ] Unease
- [ ] Cheerful
- [ ] Satisfied
- [ ] Hopeful
- [ ] Pride
- [ ] Enthusiasm
- [ ] Compassion
- [ ] Sentimental
- [ ] Disappointment
- [ ] Alienation
- [ ] Rejection
- [ ] Surprised
- [ ] Unity
- [ ] Kinship
- [ ] Indifference

If you would like to elaborate on the previous questions, you may do so here (free form)

**Interview**

Would you be willing to further help this research by participating in an interview (about 1 hour long)? LyLena will reach out to you to schedule the

interview at a time that is convenient for you.

- ○ Yes
- ○ Maybe
- ○ No