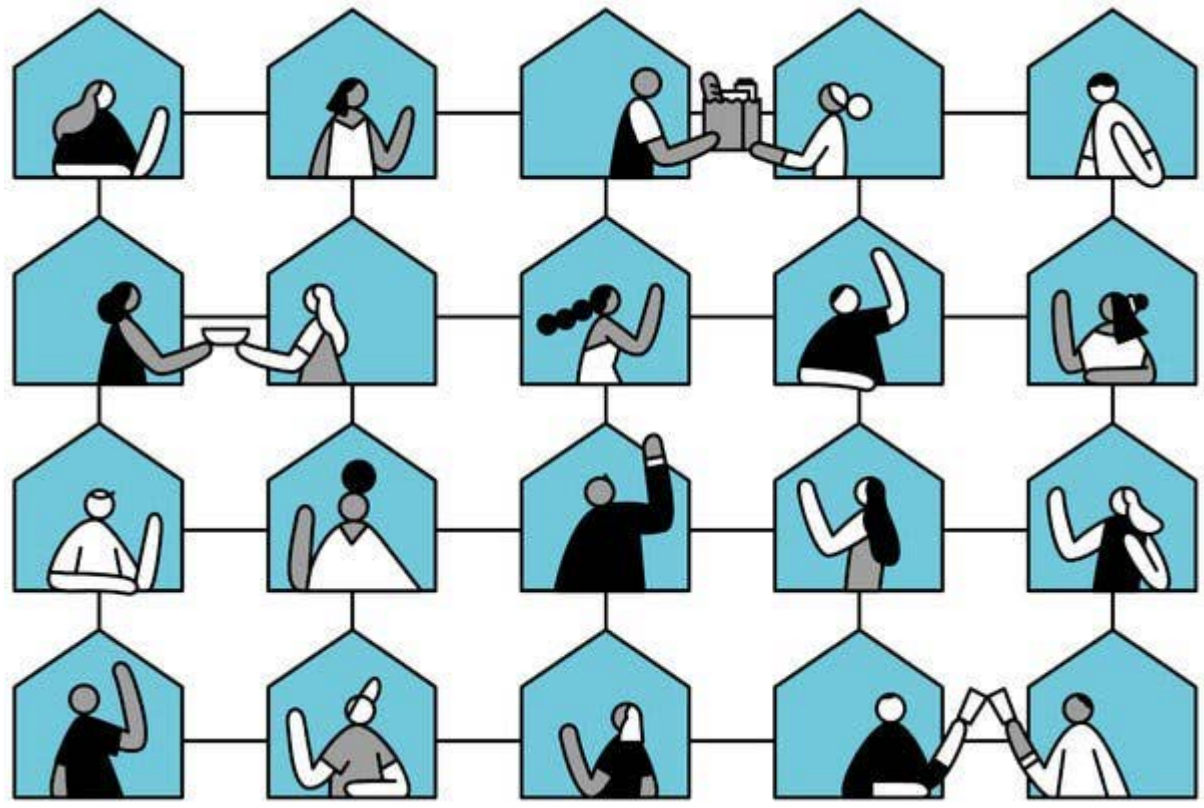




# Week : Community Group Representation

19 September 2022  
URBST 200-02  
Lecturer: Erin Lilli



# Community Groups and Representation

- This week our information will come largely from our Wednesday class discussion over this source:
  - <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/assessment/assessing-community-needs-and-resources/describe-the-community/main>



# Community Groups and Representation

- From Cnaan (1991) let's consider one dimension of community groups: Neighborhood-representation organization (NROs)
- This article sought to understand how democratic NROs are in practice—at both the local level (participatory democracy) and in the external arena (representative democracy)—through a review of pertinent literature.
- For this short lecture, I simply want to:
  - Describe two broad types of neighborhood organization
  - Define NROs and what they do
  - List the 10 criteria that describes democracy according to Cnaan (1991)

# Community Groups and Representation

- Two general categories of neighborhood organization types are:
  1. Any group (e.g., voluntary, public, or for profit) that operates within a neighborhood and serves any number of subgroups and their interests. They typically have a single-issue focus with a constituency limited to active members or users and may involve formal membership. Examples include:
    - civic associations
    - community housing development corporations
    - co-ops and local alternative schools
  2. An NRO is a local voluntary group managed by local residents with the goal of representing all residents independent of their level of personal involvement (i.e., you don't need to join or be a member or contribute to be represented). They often:
    - Apply pressure government agencies to be more accessible and more responsive to residents.
    - Become involved in a variety of communal issues concerning the residents at large.

# Community Groups and Representation

- NROs do the following:
  - Connect concerns at the individual/private level with large institutions and public life
  - Serve as an intermediary between local residents and the government and other large institutions
  - Work to empower residents and give a voice/platform to those who may not otherwise have one at that time

# Community Groups and Representation

- Regarding the exercise of democracy in NROs, there are two main views:
  - That NROs exemplify democracy in action and can be considered the core of a democratic society.
  - That NROs follow Robert Michels's famous "iron law of oligarchy," arguing that NROs are, by nature, oligarchic.
    - An oligarchy is control of the many by a few. This second stance then sees NROs as less effective at empowerment and representation, but more about wielding control over those not involved.

# Community Groups and Representation

- Ten Criteria for a democratic NRO

1. **Free, open elections:** a hallmark of all democratic societies and organizations, without it any power held by an NRO would be in the hands of those who appoint themselves and who care only for their own interest.
2. **Members' participation:** the extent to which the general members are involved in planning and policy-making in the NRO. Should have open meetings, consensus decision making, and members' participation in regular activities and decision-making bodies
3. **Informed membership:** NROs must keep their members well informed, especially on a local level where most people may know one another and rumors are frequent.
4. **Accountability to constituents:** means a high level of visibility and accountability of the organization and within it. The NRO should open their records to the public, and permit internal and external examinations of accountability, planning, and accomplishments, including independent investigations and audits.

# Community Groups and Representation

- Ten Criteria for a democratic NRO
  5. **Due process**: protects members against nepotism, injustices, and harassment; assures fair treatment and limits the power of authorities in dealing with individuals.
  6. **Level of similarity**: between elected officials and the constituency, also referred to as “descriptive representation.”
  7. **Similarity in perceived needs**: also referred to as “substantive representation”, this entails not only similarity in background but, most important, also a common perception by both leaders and constituents of problems and their urgency.
  8. **Cui bono?**: asks who actually benefits from the activity of the NRO and focuses on those who derive a practical benefit (leaders alone or the whole community). It’s a more direct indicator of democratic representation than the leaders' perceptions of problems or similarity in characteristics, although it is more difficult to measure.



# Community Groups and Representation

- Ten Criteria for a democratic NRO
  9. **Successful advocacy**: is effectiveness in representing the needs and preferences of residents vis-a-vis formal institutions, distinguishes between the personal benefits of leaders (*cui bono*) and effective representation because while some leaders might not work for their own interests, there is also the possibility that they might not work for the collective good but would give preference to the interests of government and other external public authorities.
  10. **Competition among NROs**: competition by various NROs may in itself be a positive process; however, it can weaken other democratic processes.