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Civic Learning & Engagement

Characteristics of Group Membership Among Young People

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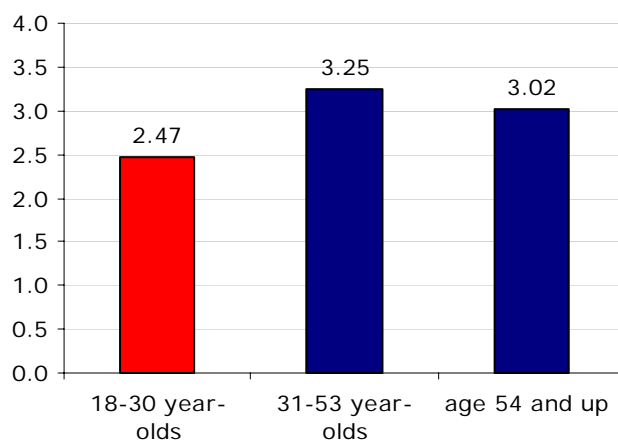
Understanding group membership among young people is an essential component of assessing civic health.² On average, young people report belonging to fewer groups than older people. Furthermore, young people of different political ideologies, races, sexes and educational levels participate in groups at different rates. Unfortunately, measuring the number of groups an individual joins is itself difficult, and this challenge has been documented.³

Two of the more recent sources of information on group memberships, the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*⁴ and the *Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*⁵ report, are utilized in this fact sheet. This fact sheet presents information on group memberships among young people. In particular, differences in political ideology, race and ethnicity, gender and educational attainment among young group members are examined.

According to the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, 18-30 year-olds belong to 2.47 groups on average, while 31-53 year-olds boast 3.25 group memberships per person. People aged 54 and up belong to an average of 3.02 groups (Graph 1).

The *Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait* report provides another source of group membership data comparable to the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*. The *Civic and Political Health of the Nation* categorized respondents into generational groups: the DotNets, aged 15-25 years old (in 2002 at the time of

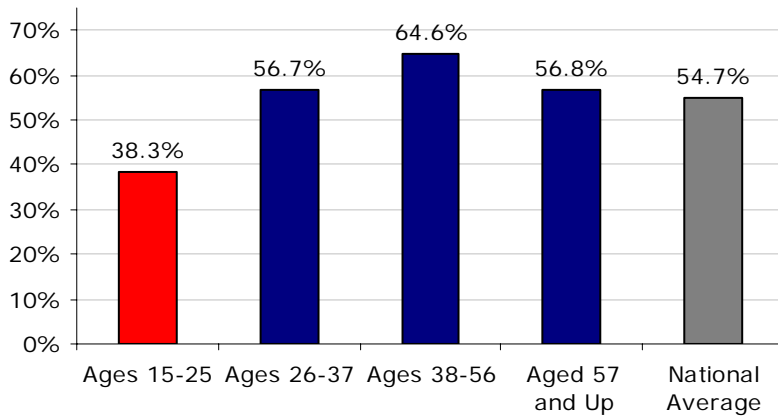
Graph 1: Mean Number of Total Group Memberships



Source: *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, 2000

the survey), Generation X, aged 26-37, Baby Boomers, aged 38-56, and Matures, aged 57 and up. This survey also provides evidence that younger generations belong to fewer groups than older generations (Graph 2⁶).

Graph 2: Percentage Belonging to or Donating Money to Groups or Associations

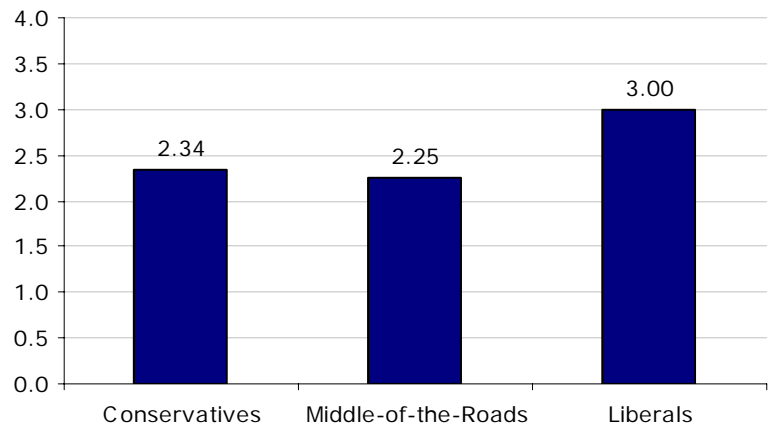


Source: *Civic and Political Health of the Nation*, September 2002.

Political Ideology

On the whole, politically liberal 18-30 year-olds belong to more groups than politically conservative or politically middle-of-the-road 18-30 year-olds, as shown in Graph 3. Of note, almost 13% of politically liberal 18-30 year-olds belong to an ethnic, nationality, or civil rights organization while only 3.2% of politically conservative and 3% of politically middle-of-the-road 18-30 year-olds are members. Also, 10.4% of politically liberal 18-30 year-olds belong to a political group while approximately 5% of politically conservative and 8% of politically middle-of-the-road 18-30 year-olds belong to political groups (Graph 4).

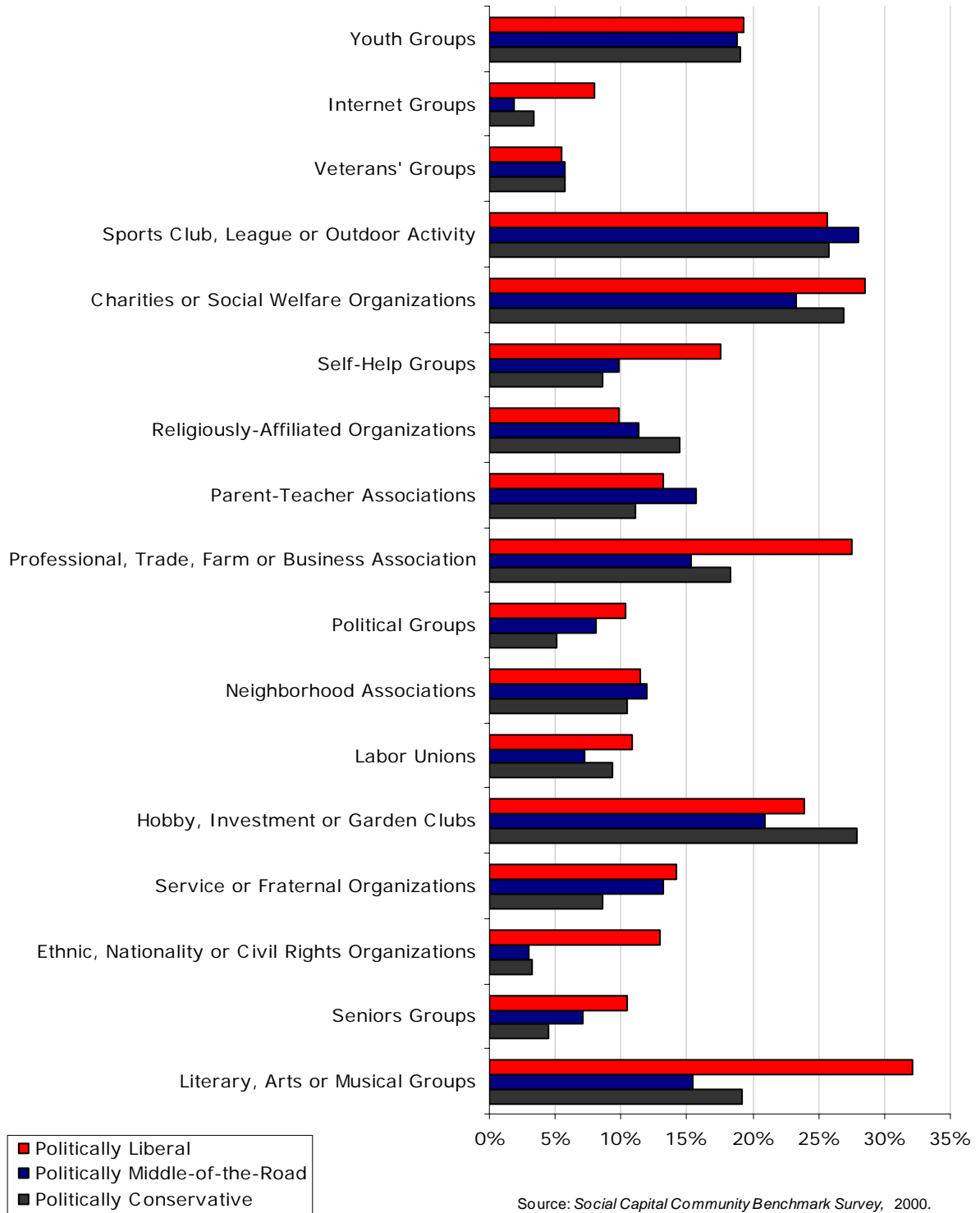
Graph 3: Mean Number of Total Group Memberships, 18-30 Year-Olds



Source: *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, 2000

Politically conservative 18-30 year-olds provide two exceptions to this trend. A greater proportion of politically conservative 18-30 year-olds belong to religiously-affiliated groups and hobby, investment or garden clubs than their politically middle-of-the-road or politically liberal counterparts.

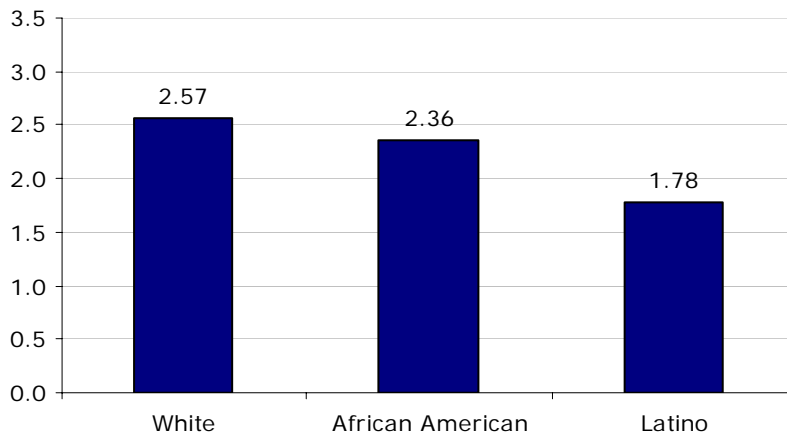
Graph 4: Political Ideology and Group Membership Among 18-30 Year-Olds



Race / Ethnicity

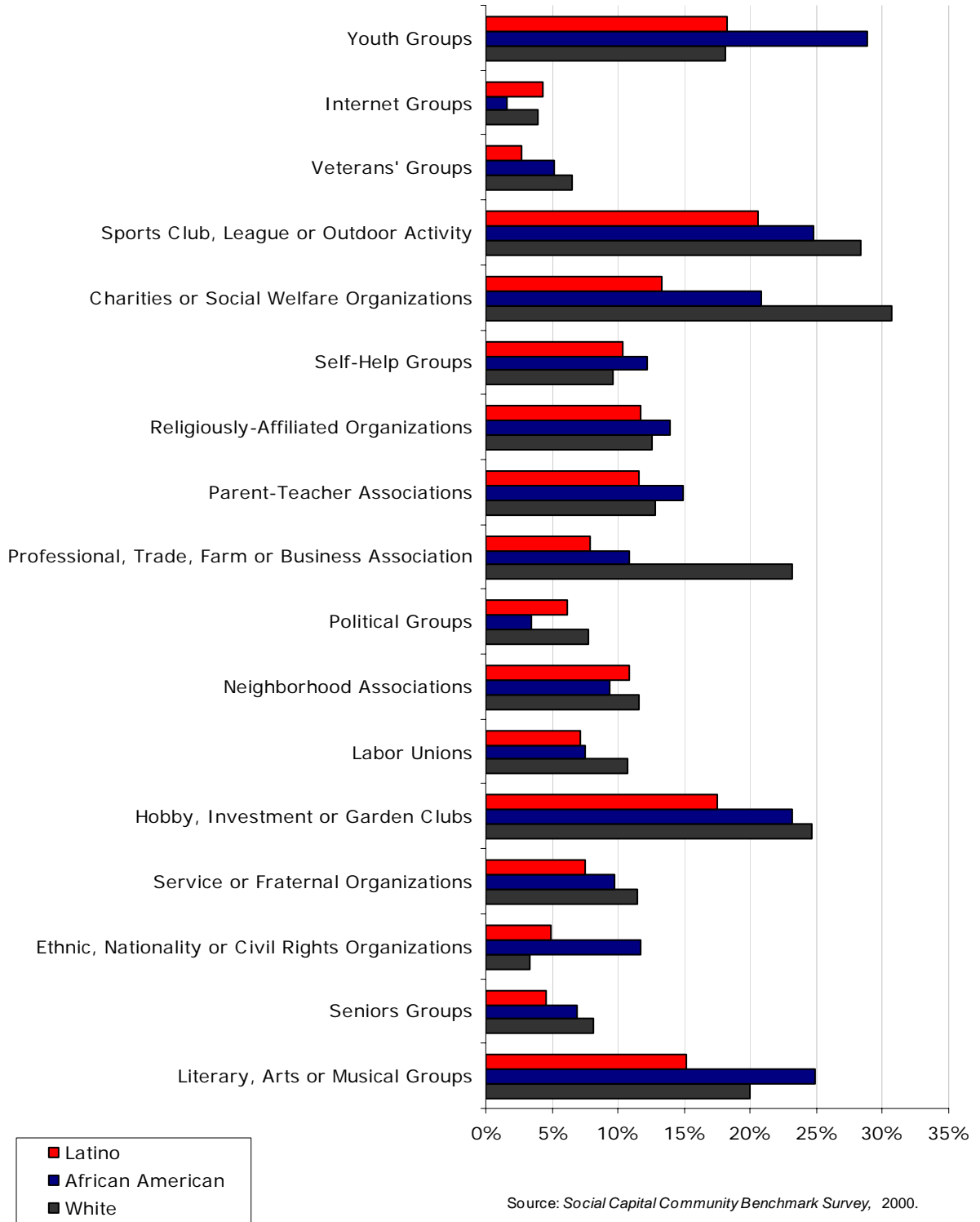
Overall, white 18-30 year-olds belong to more groups than 18-30 year-olds of other races (Graph 5). Latino 18-30 year-olds hold the least number of group memberships and are the least likely to be members of groups. Some exceptions to these trends include youth groups, self-help groups, religiously-affiliated organizations, parent-teacher organizations, ethnic, nationality or civil rights organizations, and literary, arts or musical groups, in which young African Americans are more likely to be members (Graph 6). Also, Latino 18-30 year-olds are more likely to be members of Internet groups than their white or African American counterparts.

Graph 5: Mean Number of Total Group Memberships, 18-30 Year-Olds



Source: Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, 2000

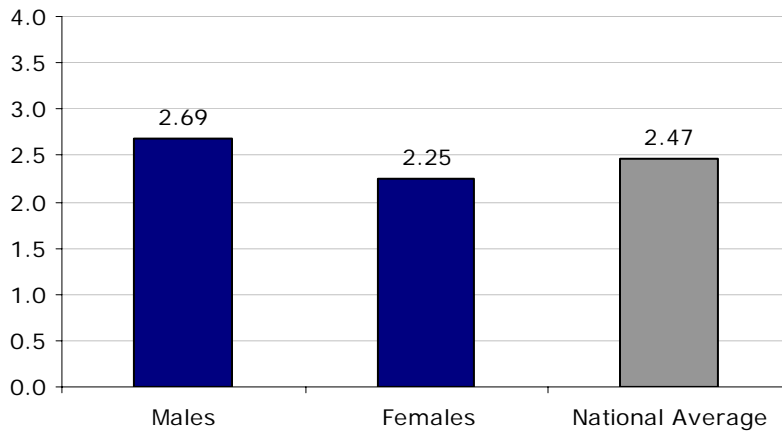
Graph 6: Race and Group Membership Among 18-30 Year-Olds



Gender

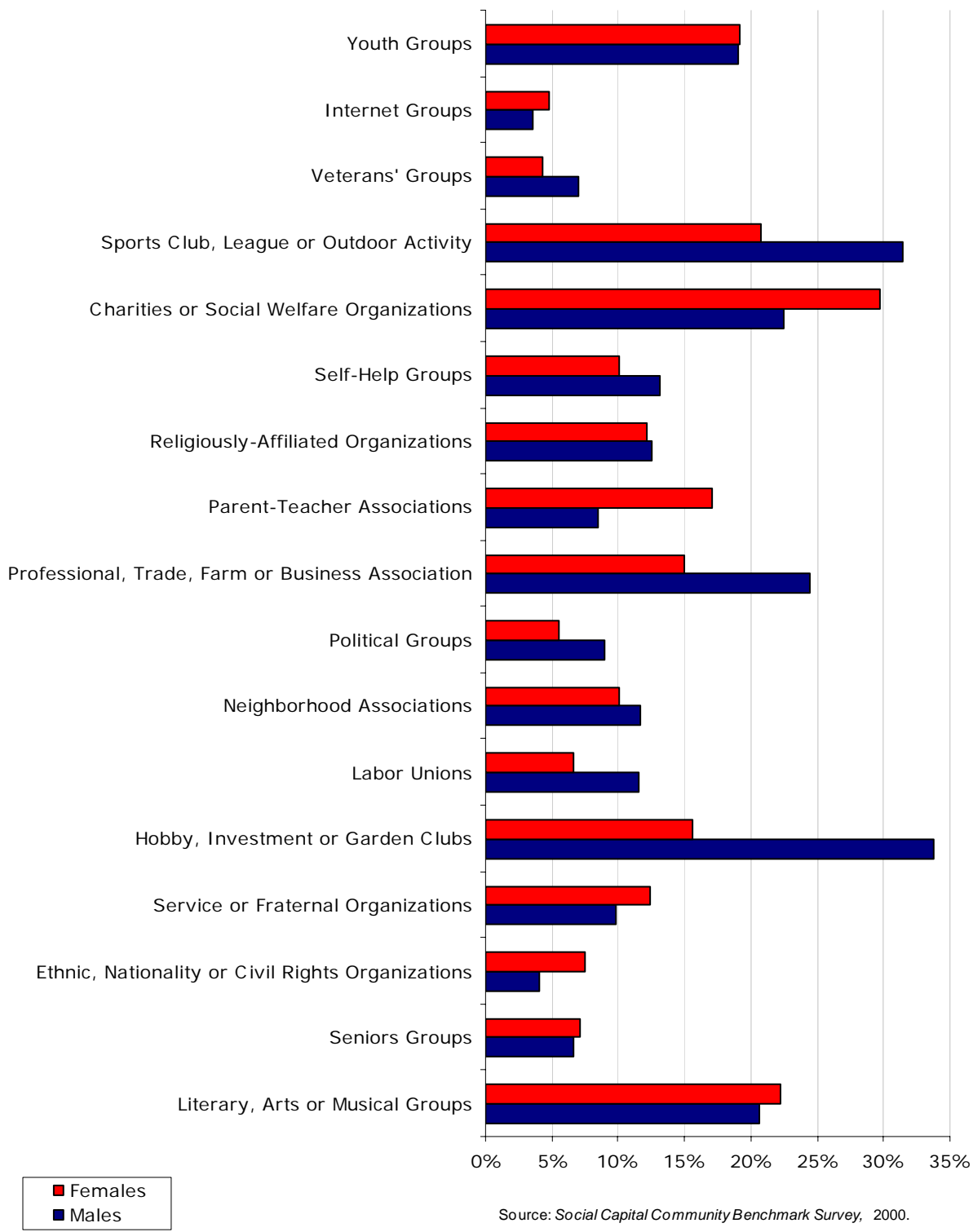
Male 18-30 year-olds belong to 2.69 groups on average, while female 18-30 year-olds belong to 2.25 groups on average (Graph 7). Some significant differences between the sexes exist. Male 18-30 year-olds are significantly more likely to be members of hobby, investment or garden clubs, labor unions, professional associations and sports clubs (Graph 8). Conversely, female 18-30 year-olds are significantly more likely to be members of parent-teacher associations and charities or social welfare organizations.

Graph 7: Mean Number of Total Group Memberships, 18-30 Year-Olds



Source: Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, 2000

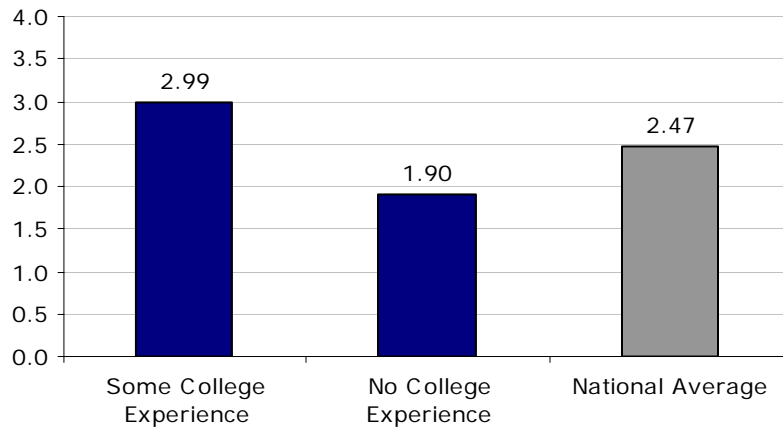
Graph 8: Gender and Group Membership Among 18-30 Year-Olds



Education

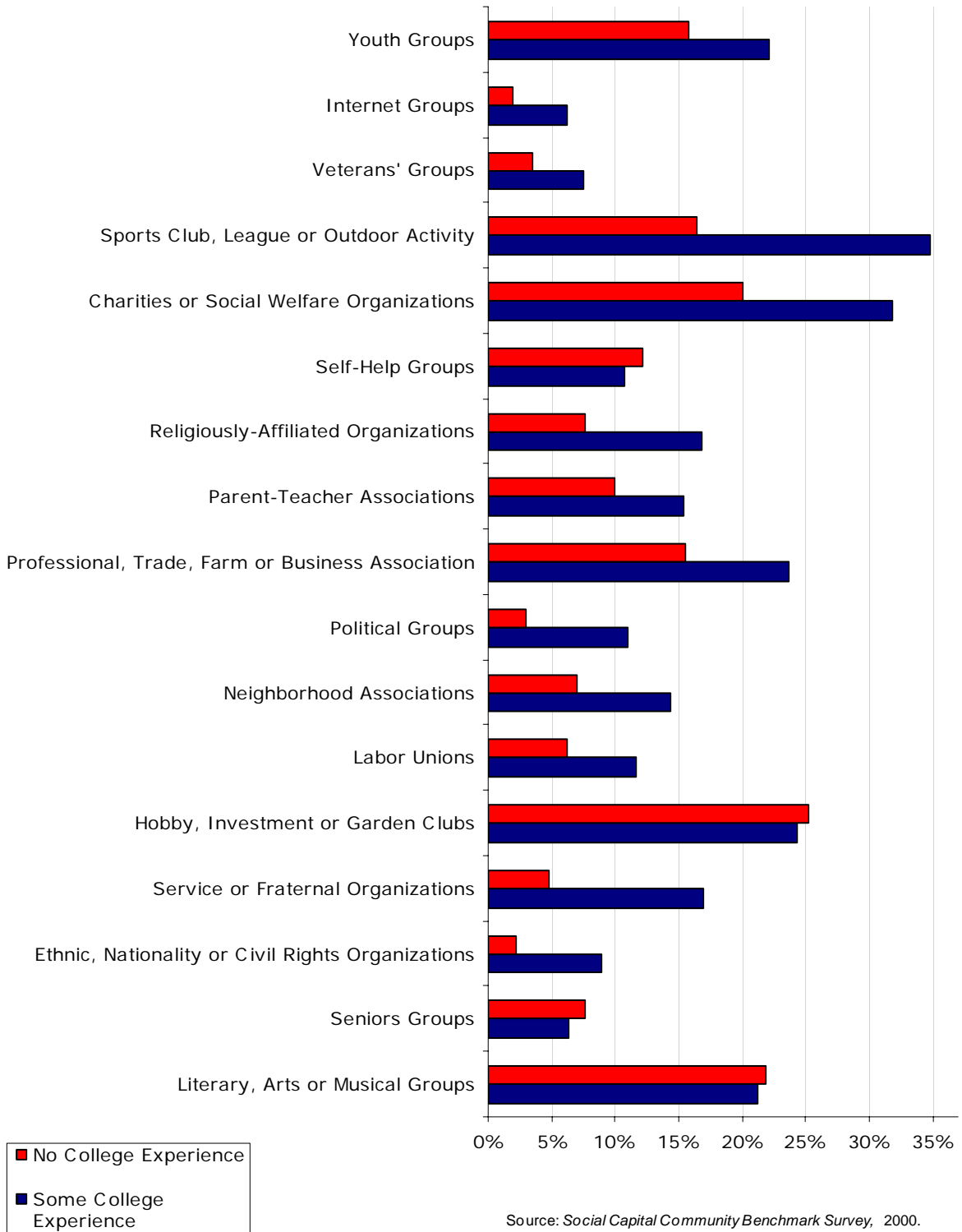
On average, 18-30 year-olds with some college experience belong to almost 3 groups while 18-30 year-olds with no college experience belong to 1.9 groups (Graph 9). In fact, young adults with some college experience are more likely to belong to every type of group, except for self-help groups, hobby, investment or garden clubs, literary, arts or musical groups, and seniors groups⁷ than young adults with no college experience (Graph 10).

Graph 9: Mean Number of Total Group Memberships, 18-30 Year-Olds



Source: Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, 2000

Graph 10: Education and Group Membership Among 18-30 Year-Olds



Notes

¹ I thank Mark Hugo Lopez, Research Director for his comments and assistance. All errors in fact or interpretation are my own.

² See *Bowling Alone* by Robert Putnam, New York: Simon Schuster, 2000 and *Civic Engagement in American Democracy*, edited by Theda Skocpol and Morris Fiorina, Washington: Brookings, 1999.

³ See also Jan Van Deth, "Measuring Social Capital: Orthodoxies and Continuing Controversies", *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 6(1) pp. 79-92 and Allen Ciglar and Mark Joslyn, "The Extensiveness of Group Membership and Social Capital: The Impact on Political Tolerance Attitudes", *Political Research Quarterly*, 55(1), pp. 7-25.

⁴ See the *Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey*, 2000, by the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, a project of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University. This nationwide telephone survey of 3,003 individuals was conducted from July to November, 2000. The survey data is available through The Roper Center for Public Opinion Research at [Hwww.ropercenter.uconn.edu/dataacq/scc_bench.html](http://www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/dataacq/scc_bench.html). More information about the Saguaro Seminar is available at [Hhttp://sparky.harvard.edu/saguaro/index.htm](http://sparky.harvard.edu/saguaro/index.htm). All calculations performed for this fact sheet with this survey data utilized the "final weight" (FWEIGHT) as provided in the survey data.

⁵ See the *Civic and Political Health of the Nation: A Generational Portrait*, by Scott Keeter, Cliff Zukin, Molly Andolina, and Krista Jenkins, September, 2002. This nationwide telephone survey of 3,300 individuals was conducted from April 4 through May 20, 2002. The report was funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and is available through the Center for Information and Research on Civic Learning (CIRCLE) at [Hwww.civicyouth.org](http://www.civicyouth.org).

⁶ Graph 2 represents the question, "Do you belong to or donate money to any groups or associations, either locally or nationally?" from the *Civic and Political Health of the Nation* report.

⁷ Only 47 people in the 18-30 year-old age group stated that they participate in seniors groups, making it difficult to draw conclusions from this cohort about this group membership.