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*Comparative Political Studies* 2006 39: 1220

DOI: 10.1177/0010414005281937

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# Civic Responsibility and Patterns of Voluntary Participation Around the World

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This article seeks to explain why different types of volunteer organizations are prevalent in different countries. It hypothesizes that patterns of volunteer participation are a function of citizen attitudes toward governmental and individual responsibility for caring for society. Those countries (e.g., Japan)—where citizens think that governments should be responsible for dealing with social problems—will tend to have higher participation in embedded volunteer organizations, such as parent-teacher associations. Those countries (e.g., the United States)—where citizens think that individuals should take responsibility for dealing with social problems—will tend to have more participation in nonembedded, organizations, such as Greenpeace. These hypotheses are tested statistically using membership data from eight organizations in 68 countries. Alternative explanations, such as levels of income, education, urbanization, and prevalence of working women, are also tested. Citizen attitudes about individual and governmental responsibility are best able to explain the prevalence of different types of volunteer organizations found in different countries.

**Keywords:** *citizen attitudes; civil society; Japan; nonprofit organizations; volunteering*

Studies of comparative civil society tell a consistent story about volunteer participation in advanced democracies: The United States is always at or near the top of the pack, Japan trails in the rear, and European countries such as Britain and France occupy the space in the middle. This is true whether the studies examine participation using survey data such as the World Values

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**Author's Note:** The author acknowledges Jim Caporaso, Manolis Kaparakis, Joel Migdal, T. J. Pempel, Robert Putnam, Theda Skocpol, and three anonymous reviewers for helpful comments on earlier versions of this article.

Surveys (WVSs) or whether they look at the size of and participation in non-profit organizations such as the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project. If these studies are accurate—that Americans belong to “a nation of joiners” (Schlesinger, 1944) and that Japanese do not—then why does Japan have more than twice as many volunteer firefighters and more than three times as many parent-teacher association (PTA) members as the United States?<sup>1</sup>

This article argues that current studies of comparative civil society have been systematically biased in favor of the types of volunteer participation found commonly in the United States and against those commonly found in Japan. In particular, studies have not reported participation in organizations such as PTAs or neighborhood associations that are prevalent in Japan. Because these volunteer organizations have close, embedded relationships with the government, they have often been overlooked in studies of civil society. Because Japan is not the only country where this kind of participation is prevalent—people in Spain and Germany volunteer in patterns similar to Japanese—a more detailed and inclusive conceptualization of volunteer organizations that make up civil society is necessary to understand participation patterns around the world.

This article argues that different patterns of volunteer participation are a function of citizen attitudes toward governmental and individual responsibility for solving social problems. In countries (such as Japan) where citizens think that the government should take responsibility for social-welfare problems, there will be more organizations that have close, embedded relationships with the government to resolve these problems. In countries (such as the United States) where citizens think that individuals should take responsibility for social-welfare problems, there will be more organizations that have more distant, independent relationships with the state.

This article begins by comparing volunteering rates in the United States and Japan to demonstrate the high level of volunteering in Japan and to identify the distinct patterns of volunteer participation in the two countries. The next section proposes several possible reasons that these patterns exist. The third section reports a test of the hypothesis that volunteering patterns in a country are a function of citizen attitudes toward governmental and individual responsibility using data collected from eight volunteer organizations in 68 countries worldwide. This section also tests alternative explanations for

1. In 2000, the United States had 777,350 volunteer firefighters (Karter, 2001, p. 1) and 6 million parent-teacher association (PTA) members (<http://www.pta.org/aboutpta/index.asp>); Japan had 951,069 volunteer firefighters (Fire and Disaster Management Agency, 2005) and 9 million PTA members (<http://www.nippon-pta.or.jp/chihou/index2.htm>). Thus, on a per capita basis, Japan had 2.2 times as many volunteer firefighters and 3.3 times as many PTA members as the United States.

**Table 1**  
**Volunteer Participation in the**  
**United States and Japan for Selected Organizations**

Organization	United States	Japan
Amnesty International	<b>1.06 (300,000 members)</b>	0.05 (6,461 members)
Greenpeace	<b>0.89 (250,000 members)</b>	0.04 (4,500 members)
Labor unions	57.05 (16.1 million)	<b>87.49 (11.1 million)</b>
Lions Club	<b>1.55 (437,887 members)</b>	1.07 (135,285 members)
Parent Teacher Association	21.26 (6 million members)	<b>72.09 (9,146,350 members)</b>
Red Cross	41.46 (11.7 million members)	<b>167.10 (21.2 million members)</b>
Rotary Club	<b>1.39 (391,072 members)</b>	0.84 (106,628 members)
Scouts (boy, girl, etc.)	<b>22.11 (6,239,435)</b>	1.74 (220,223 members)
Seniors' association <sup>a</sup>	<b>69.09 (19.5 million)</b>	68.93 (8.7 million members)
Volunteer firefighters	2.75 (777,350 firefighters)	<b>7.50 (951,069 firefighters)</b>
Women's associations	1.82 (500,000 members)	<b>39.41 (5 million members)</b>
YMCA	<b>62.18 (17,549,364 members)</b>	0.90 (114,256 members)
Total	245.47 (69,278,036 members)	<b>445.64 (56,538,422 members)</b>

a. The figures are the number of members older than 65 because the seniors' associations (*rojinkai*) in Japan begin membership at age 65. Total AARP membership is 35 million.

variation in volunteer participation, such as level of education, income, urbanization, and so on. The article concludes with a discussion of the implications of these findings for the study of comparative civil society.

## Volunteer Participation in the United States and Japan

To compare volunteer participation rates in the United States and Japan, Table 1 lists the per capita rate of participation (number of members  $\times$  1,000/total population) and the gross membership in parentheses. A full list of data sources can be found on the author's Web site (<http://mahaddad.web.wesleyan.edu>). The country with the highest per capita membership in each organization is in boldface type.

As Table 1 indicates, Japanese do not volunteer less than Americans; they may, in fact, volunteer more. Certainly, they volunteer differently. The organizations in Table 1 are listed alphabetically, but there is a clear pattern to the types of organizations preferred by each country. Japanese have comparatively higher participation in those organizations that have embedded relationships with the government, whereas Americans have comparatively

higher participation in those organizations that do not have embedded relationships with the government.

By embedded relationship, I mean that the organization has frequent, habitual interactions with the bureaucracy and engages in the policy-making and implementation processes with bureaucrats. Embedded organizations include neighborhood associations, PTA groups, and volunteer fire departments to name a few. These organizations are made up primarily of volunteers and may have service missions that are broad (such as neighborhood associations) or narrow (such as volunteer fire departments). They may or may not receive financial support from the government.

The distinction between embedded and nonembedded organizations is different from the common dichotomies of dependent-independent, formal-informal, professional-volunteer, or membership-advocacy.<sup>2</sup> Common among embedded organizations is their institutionalized relationship with the government. Whether or not this relationship is stipulated by law (the role and function of a volunteer fire department is often legally defined, whereas those of neighborhood associations seldom are), these groups have close, ongoing relationships with municipalities and/or specific government ministries and participate in both the formation and the implementation of policy. They can be embedded at the local level, as in the case of a community's volunteer fire department, and at the national level, such as a national PTA that is involved in formulating education policy. In general, these groups tend to pursue policy goals through "internal" political channels—going directly to bureaucrats—rather than by lobbying politicians.

Civil-society organizations can be placed along a spectrum, ranging from embedded to nonembedded, so these types should be conceptualized as ideal types rather than as strict categories. For example, neighborhood associations are located at the embedded end of the spectrum; environmental advocacy organizations could be situated at the nonembedded end of the spectrum; whereas a church group working with the city on a homeless shelter project might be somewhere in between.

Most organizations lie somewhere in between the two extremes. A social-welfare nonprofit group that is organizationally distinct from the government and relies heavily on volunteer labor might appear to be nonembedded. But, if it receives the majority of its funding from the government and has its programmatic decisions made in close consultation with government officials, it may appear more embedded. A professional organization, such as the Amer-

2. An embedded organization could be dependent or independent of the government; it could be highly formal in its institutional structure or more informally organized; it could have a highly professional membership or an entirely volunteer membership; its main mission could be concerned with the activities of its members or it could focus on advocacy of a particular cause.

ican Medical Association may be primarily nonembedded, but to the extent that it is integrated into the policy-making process, it becomes more embedded.

Volunteer groups with similar names or functions may be quite different in the extent to which they are embedded, depending on the context. For example, seniors' organizations are quite different in the United States and Japan. In the United States, AARP (formerly called the American Association for Retired Persons) is one of the most powerful lobbying forces in Washington, D.C. It has a total membership of 35 million people, 1,860 full-time staff members nationwide (1,200 in Washington, D.C., alone), and annual revenues of nearly \$600 million. It was formed in 1958 for the purpose of promoting the interests of older people. AARP does have 3,100 local chapters, but most AARP members simply pay their dues, receive their newsletter, and count on their national organization to lobby for their interests; they do not gather together on a regular basis to chat, go on hikes, or make crafts.<sup>3</sup>

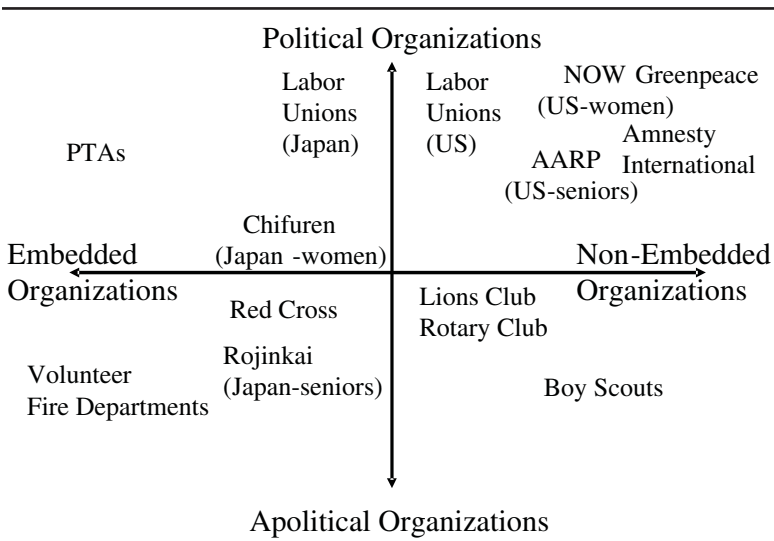
Japan's equivalent of AARP, *Zenkoku Rojin Kurabu Rengokai* (Japan Federation of Senior Citizens Clubs [JFSCC]) could not be more different. Although it has an office in Tokyo, it has essentially no full-time staff members and a budget of only \$2 million. In contrast to AARP, which was formed and has existed primarily as an advocacy organization, JFSCC was formed in 1950 as the national representative of thousands of smaller seniors' clubs that meet at least weekly for outings, activities, and fellowship. When these organizations become involved in politics, rather than lobby at the national level, they go directly to their local bureaucrats in policy making and implementation on issues involving seniors. In contrast to AARP's 3,100 local chapters, JFSCC has 133,219 independent clubs with a membership of 8.7 million people.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to differences in the degree of embedding, organizations may also vary in the extent to which they are politically involved. Many groups are not actively involved in politics. Associational groups such as book clubs and alumni organizations are often more interested in bringing people together than in advocating on behalf of a particular cause. Other organizations that attract volunteers are primarily geared toward service delivery, such as a neighborhood soup kitchen or a hospital, so political activity might be only peripheral to their work. Finally, for some groups, political advocacy on behalf of a particular group of people or a cause is their primary mission—

3. Figures are from the AARP home page, <http://www.aarp.org/leadership/Articles/a2002-12-18-aarpfactsheet.html> (retrieved May 15, 2003), and from telephone conversations with the AARP research department.

4. See Japan Federation of Senior Citizens Clubs (2003).

**Figure 1**  
**Volunteer Organizations in the United States and Japan**



Note: Organizations where Japan has comparatively higher rates of participation are in bold.

these groups can be either embedded (such as the Japanese organization for seniors or a neighborhood association) or nonembedded (such as the American organization for seniors or Greenpeace). Figure 1 divides the different organizations listed in Table 1 according to these two dimensions—embeddedness and politicization. This figure highlights the different volunteering patterns in the United States and Japan.

As Figure 1 illustrates, Japanese have much higher rates of participation in embedded organizations than their counterparts in the United States. Furthermore, when similar groups take different organizational forms in the two countries, they tend to be embedded in Japan and nonembedded in the United States (e.g., seniors' associations, women's associations, labor unions).

## Revisiting the Literature on Civil Society

If Japan has such high rates of volunteering in embedded organizations, why does it always come in last in comparative studies of civil society? This section revisits the literature on comparative civil society to investigate this discrepancy between the high levels of volunteer participation in Japan found in empirical data and the low participation rates reported in the litera-

ture. The most comprehensive study of comparative civil society has been conducted by the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Research Project. Its first major publication was *Global Civil Society* (Salamon, Anheier, List, Toepler, & Skolowski, 1999) with a subsequent volume published in 2004. Drawing on research collected by teams from around the world, the book provides a systematic and detailed country-by-country analysis of the nonprofit sector in Europe, North and South America, Asia, and the Middle East (22 countries in the first volume and 36 countries in the second volume). The authors closely examine the relative size, types of activities, funding sources, and employment (paid vs. volunteer) structures of the nonprofit sectors in each country.

This massive research project is generating important new empirical data and changing the way comparative scholars view civil society around the world. However, the research is specifically focused on the nonprofit sector as a sector in the economy, and thus, it places emphasis on the economic influence of the sector—how many employees it has, how large its revenues are, and the economic (full-time equivalent) contributions of volunteers.

Because the project is attempting to be rigorous in its definition and measurement of the nonprofit sector around the world, small, local organizations with entirely volunteer staffs are often not included. Due to differences in legal definitions of organization status and national data-collection methods, this was a particular problem for accurate representation of civil society in Japan.<sup>5</sup>

Organizations included in the study were classified into 12 “fields of nonprofit activity”: culture, education and research, health, social services, environment, development, civic and advocacy, philanthropy, international, religious congregations, business and professional and unions, and other (Salamon et al., 1999, p. 7). Most embedded organizations, for example, neighborhood organizations or volunteer fire departments, are difficult to classify under this scheme because they fall in between categories; therefore, participation in these types of organizations has often been overlooked or underrepresented. In the authors’ ranking of countries by the size of their nonprofit sectors including volunteer labor, the Netherlands is ranked 1, the United States is 3, and Japan trails in 12th place out of 16 countries.<sup>6</sup>

5. Salamon et al. (1999) say in their appendix on data collection that the sources relied on in Japan “focus on corporations providing public goods and services, while seriously under-reporting purely voluntary associations” (p. 492). See Yamamoto (1998, pp. 152-170) for a detailed description of the data included in the Nonprofit Sector Research Project studies.

6. See Salamon et al. (1999, p. 134). Ranking is the nonprofit sectors’ proportion (paid and in-kind employment) of the nonagricultural labor force in 1995.



In contrast to the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project's emphasis on nonprofit organizations, the World Values Survey (WVS) project focuses on civic associations and citizen attitudes toward government and one another. The methodology of this project is different, relying on survey rather than membership data. Furthermore, the surveys are more interested in capturing the beliefs and practices of citizens around the world than in trying to document the size of the voluntary sector.

The WVS asks specific questions about participation in organizations such as churches, sports clubs, and unions rather than about volunteer work for incorporated nonprofit organizations or smaller, embedded organizations. In a seminal 1992 study using the 1990 WVS, James Curtis, Edward Grabb, and Douglas Baer (1992) did a series of statistical analyses to test whether the United States could be characterized as "a nation of joiners" when compared with other countries, and they attempted to identify reasons for why citizens in different countries joined more or less.

They found that the United States was clearly at the top of the pack of 15 countries when no controls were used in the analysis but that its relative rank changed when churches and/or unions were excluded, although it still remained among the top group of countries. Likewise, Japan was at or near the bottom of the group of countries in terms of associational membership, no matter which model was used (Curtis et al., 1992).

Although the WVS captures a different aspect of volunteer participation than does the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, it also overlooks and obscures the importance of embedded organizations. The WVS asks respondents if they volunteer for, are members of, or do not belong to the following groups: church or religious organizations, sport or recreation organizations, art or music or educational organizations, labor union, political party, environmental organization, professional association, charitable organizations, and any other voluntary organizations (Inglehart, 2004). As with the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, none of these categories seeks responses from volunteers in embedded volunteer organizations. For the most part, the only place for these volunteers to record their participation is in the "other" category.

Both the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project and the WVSs are generating valuable empirical data—I use much of it in my own work. My intention here is not to criticize these projects for failing to capture the whole of civil society; I am very doubtful that any single research project could do so. My main purpose is to caution scholars who are using these important data resources from assuming that these studies represent the whole of civil society.

I want to underscore that the associations missing from these studies are not just a random assortment of groups, which might increase an error term

in a statistical analysis but would not affect the legitimacy of general findings. Overlooking embedded volunteer organizations in comparative studies of civil society has created a *systematic bias* in favor of certain types of organizations, in particular, the types of organizations that are found in the United States, and a bias against the types of organizations found in many other countries in the world, Japan in particular. This bias results in the incorrect conclusion that Japan and other countries with similar volunteering patterns have weak and underdeveloped civil societies, when, in fact, their civil societies may be equally well developed and just taking on a different shape.

## Explaining Patterns of Participation

Now that it is clear that there are different patterns of volunteer participation rates between the United States and Japan, I turn to explaining those patterns. This section asks a more general version of the question raised at the beginning of the article: Why do some countries have more volunteers in embedded organizations, whereas other countries have fewer volunteers in that type of organization? Using volunteering data from around the world, two hypotheses are tested to explain the observed variation in volunteering patterns between the United States and Japan. Common alternative explanations for participation rates such as education, income, urbanization, and so on, are also included in the analyses.

*Hypothesis 1:* Countries where citizens think that the government should be responsible for dealing with social problems will tend to have more volunteer participation in embedded organizations.

*Hypothesis 2:* Countries where citizens think that individuals should be responsible for dealing with social problems will tend to have more volunteer participation in organizations that do not have embedded relationships with the government.

I argue that citizen attitudes about governmental and individual responsibility for dealing with social problems help determine the *types* of organizations that are most prevalent in a community. Note that this prediction does not claim anything about the *rates* of volunteering; it assumes that some other factor brings about volunteer participation and is focused only on predicting the types of organizations that will be prevalent in a community.<sup>7</sup>

7. For an explanation of the factors that influence the rate of participation in a community, see Haddad (2004).

When communities believe that the government should be responsible for dealing with social problems, they are likely to form and to join organizations that work with the government to accomplish this aim. Organizations that work closely with the government to ameliorate social problems are considered to be legitimate and engaged in productive activities. In contrast, when communities think that individuals should be responsible for dealing with social problems, they are likely to form and to join organizations that are not embedded in the government. In this context, organizations that rely primarily on the efforts of private individuals are considered to be legitimate and engaged in productive activities.

Note that these two hypotheses are not necessarily in opposition to one another. The examples presented thus far suggest that in countries where citizens think that the government should be responsible for dealing with social problems, citizens also think that individuals should not be responsible for dealing with social problems, leading to many embedded organizations and few nonembedded organizations (e.g., Japan). Or, in countries where citizens think that individuals should be responsible for dealing with social problems, they also think that government should not be responsible for these problems, leading to participation in nonembedded organizations and not in embedded ones (e.g., the United States).

However, theoretically speaking, there is no reason why citizens in a country might not think that both government and individuals should be responsible for dealing with social problems, a situation that would lead to participation in both embedded and nonembedded organizations. Finland could be an example of such a country; it has high levels of volunteer participation in both embedded and nonembedded types of organizations.

This article is primarily interested in explaining cross-national variation in patterns of volunteer participation. Therefore, it uses cross-sectional data. This methodology makes it impossible to determine that the causal arrow points in the direction hypothesized—from citizen attitudes to organizational patterns to government policy. To test this claim, time-series data and/or historical analysis would be necessary. Although such a test lies outside the scope of this article, an example can serve as an illustration of how the process is hypothesized to work.

Responses to the 1995 Great Hanshin Earthquake near Kobe, Japan, illustrate how gradual changes in citizen attitudes led to adjustments in their volunteering behavior, which eventually led to alteration of government policy. Japanese attitudes about government and individual responsibility have been shifting slowly in the past half century as the problems of society have become more complex and the government has become less able to deal with them. Although Japanese still think that the government should be primarily

responsible for dealing with social problems, there has been an increase in the understanding that private individuals and organizations must also step up to find solutions.

After the earthquake near Kobe killed 6,000 people, 1.2 million volunteers descended into the Kansai region to assist in the rescue and recovery effort. Although embedded organizations played a very important role (See Konishi [1998] about the role volunteer firefighters played in the rescue effort), many of the volunteers turned to the nonembedded organizations to coordinate and direct their efforts. Many of these organizations had been lobbying for years to change the regulatory structure, so it would be easier for nonprofit organizations to become incorporated; they took the political opportunity that came with the high interest in nonprofits following the outpouring of volunteers after the earthquake to press the government for reform. Three years later, the government passed a new law significantly easing restrictions on the formation and governance of nonprofit organizations.<sup>8</sup>

The shift in Japanese attitudes and its influence on volunteering patterns and government policy have taken time. In the words of one city-government official I interviewed in Sakata City in 2002, "In the postwar period the government was made responsible for everything, for everyone's wellbeing. [Over time] there has been a progression from government as the [sole] authority to government sponsorship, where it is not just the government that is responsible—people have to take care of their own neighborhood." After this comment, he went on to describe the way that city officials have responded by creating a number of new government programs designed to support volunteer organizations, especially nonembedded organizations, working in their community. These anecdotal examples serve to illustrate how changing citizen attitudes lead to changes in the types of organizations that they join and support in their communities and how those organizations, in turn, press for changes in government policy.

Returning to the test of the hypotheses of how community attitudes toward governmental and individual responsibility affect the types of volunteer organizations prevalent in different countries, I collected data from eight different organizations that are active around the world. These organizations were chosen for three reasons. First, they were selected because they represent both embedded and nonembedded groups. Second, many of the groups are international organizations, which allows for comparability across countries (whereas unions might be embedded in one country and nonembedded in another, it is reasonable to assume that the Red Cross or Greenpeace have roughly the same level of embeddedness in each of the countries in which

8. For an excellent and detailed account of the politics behind the law, see Pekkanen (2000).

they operate). Finally, membership data are often not collected at a national level, so it was difficult to gather information; membership data for a large number of countries were available for each of these eight organizations.

Three of the organizations—PTAs, the Red Cross, and volunteer fire departments—are embedded organizations with close relationships with government bureaucracies. Their embeddedness is determined by their institutional relationship with the government. Both PTAs and volunteer fire departments have close institutional relationships with particular government bureaucracies—schools in the case of PTAs and municipal fire departments in the case of volunteer fire departments. The Red Cross also works closely with government bureaucracies. In its domestic blood-donor work, the organization has become integrated into the public (and in some cases, private) hospital network. In its international relief work, the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies works closely with governments to distribute aid and to provide relief to victims of natural or other disasters.

Five of the organizations—Greenpeace, Lions Clubs International, Rotary Clubs International, Scouting International, and the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)—have missions and organizational structures that are explicitly independent of the government, without embedded ties to bureaucratic agencies. Per capita membership rates in these organizations constitute the dependent variables in the following analysis.

The independent variable—citizen attitudes toward governmental and individual responsibility for dealing with social problems—is measured using data from the 2000 WVS and European Values Survey (EVS). I argued earlier in this article that these surveys were not well designed to capture the total quantity of volunteers in a country because of the limited number of groups listed in the questions. However, the surveys are designed to capture citizen attitudes, so although they may not correctly identify whether individuals volunteer for the local fire department, it should correctly record their attitudes toward government. Therefore, although not perfect, these surveys are a good way of gauging the prevalence of certain attitudes within particular countries.

The two surveys asked a series of similar questions to people in 68 independent countries (the EVS covered 33 countries, and the WVS, 37 countries, with both surveys covering 2 countries in common) during 1999 and 2000 (Inglehart, 2004). Citizen attitudes about governmental and individual responsibility were measured by responses to question 143 in the WVS and question 54 in the EVS (variable e37 in the database). Respondents were asked to rank their opinions on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning that the

respondent completely agreed with the statement, “People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves,” and with 10 meaning that the respondent completely agreed with the statement, “The government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for” (Inglehart, 2004, pp. 40, 71). The percentage of respondents in a country with a mean of 6 to 10 (indicating a strong attitude of governmental responsibility and/or a weak attitude of individual responsibility) is used as the citizen-attitude variable in all of the following regression analyses.

Note that the way the WVSs collect these data—placing the attitudes of governmental and individual responsibility at the opposite ends of a single spectrum—makes it impossible to distinguish between a respondent who thinks that both government and individuals should deal with social problems and a respondent who thinks that neither one should deal with these problems, because both might give 5 as an answer. The use of this measurement should not imply that the theoretical framework is similarly limited—*theoretically speaking*, it is possible for citizens of a country to think that both government and individuals should be responsible for dealing with social problems.

In addition to the variable that I hypothesize will account for variation in volunteering patterns—citizen attitudes toward governmental and individual responsibility for dealing with social problems—there are several alternative explanations for variation in volunteering rates that are also tested.

Scholars who research variation in volunteer participation can be divided into two groups. The first group looks primarily at individual characteristics to explain variation in volunteer-participation rates. The second group looks at collective characteristics to explain the same variation. The first group of scholars is primarily concerned with explaining changes in volunteer participation in the United States over the past half century. These scholars vary widely on their prognoses. Robert Putnam (2000) documents the extensive decline of participation; Everett Ladd (1999) documents the extensive rise in participation; and Robert Wuthnow (1998) and Theda Skocpol (2003) suggest that some kinds of participation are declining, whereas others are rising.

Although these scholars vary in their diagnoses of the health of civil society in the United States, they all agree on the set of characteristics that determine an individual’s propensity to volunteer. In particular, higher income and education levels increase the likelihood that an individual will be civically engaged. The conclusions on the influence of dual-income families (i.e., working women) are more mixed; some studies find that having two income earners in the family decreases leisure time, whereas others find that women involved in the workforce are more likely than their stay-at-home

counterparts to join and participate in professional associations and other forms of civic organizations.<sup>9</sup>

These studies have identified a number of variables that predict variations in volunteer participation. However, authors often assume that volunteering is purely a function of individual motivations, so variation in individual-level factors should translate perfectly into collective-level variation. These assumptions have two problems. First, ecological correlations do not necessarily have a positive relationship with individual-level correlations for purely mathematical reasons. Second, there can be collective-level factors that influence ecological patterns independent of, or in conjunction with, individual effects.

As Robinson has demonstrated in his classic article on the problems of drawing collective-level conclusions from individual-level data, "There need be no correspondence between the individual correlation and the ecological correlation" (Robinson, 1950, p. 354). Through a careful mathematical proof, Robinson shows his readers that there are an infinite number of individual correlations that could correspond with any given ecological correlation. The differences were not only in magnitude but could even be in sign.

To give an example of how factors that predict individual volunteering rates may not correctly predict collective volunteering rates for purely mathematical reasons, imagine two communities each with a population of 10 people. In Community A, one person earns \$1,000 a week, and the other 9 earn nothing; the rich person volunteers, and the others do not. In Community B, all 10 people earn \$90 a week, and they all volunteer. Therefore, Community A's average income is higher than Community B's (\$100 compared with \$90). Given these data, it is quite possible for two statements to be simultaneously true: (a) richer people volunteer more than poorer people, and (b) richer communities volunteer less than poorer communities. Thus, for purely mathematical reasons, ecological relationships between variables may be quite different than a simple aggregation of the individual-level variables would lead one to expect.

In addition to simple properties of mathematics that confound individual and ecological relationships, contextual factors may also cause community-level variation. The influence of social factors is likely to be particularly important for volunteering. As Adam Pzworski asserts in his article on contextual models, "Social context has an effect on the behavior of an individual

9. For an excellent review of the literature on characteristics that promote volunteer participation in individuals, see Smith (1994), which examines contextual, social background, personality, attitude, and situational variables. Smith (2000) also provides a number of very detailed literature reviews of work on volunteering.

if two conditions obtain: (1) interaction takes place, and (2) this interaction is effective in converting either of the participants” (Przeworski, 1974, p. 30). These conditions are clearly present in volunteering because the activity by its very nature involves social interaction not only with clients but often with other volunteers as well. Thus, there is a high possibility that social context could affect volunteering behavior.

Indeed, one set of scholars does use collective or environmental characteristics to explain variations in volunteer behavior. The empirical findings for these studies are more mixed than those for the individual-level effects. One contextual effect that has been studied is the effect of rural versus urban contexts on volunteering behavior. Several studies have found that people living in rural areas and those that live in smaller, close-knit communities are more likely to volunteer than those in urban areas (Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Oliver, 2000). Others have found that there is no significant difference in the volunteering rates between people living in urban and rural areas (Lesk & Zippel, 1975; Steblay, 1987).

Another collective effect that has been extensively studied is the influence of government policy on the numbers of nonprofit organizations and volunteers. Both Lester Salamon’s *Partners in Public Service* (1995) and Steven Rathgeb Smith and Michael Lipsky’s *Nonprofits for Hire* (1993) find extensive government–private-sector cooperation in the delivery of public services. Although Salamon takes a more historical perspective and Smith and Lipsky examine the contemporary situation more closely, both reveal the heavy reliance of the nonprofit sector on government funding. They demonstrate that there has been a positive relationship between government funding and the scope and size of the nonprofit sector (and its associated volunteers). Roger Kemp’s edited volume *Privatization* (1991) comes to the opposite conclusion. Through an examination of many different service areas, from garbage collection to firefighting services, the authors argue that increased government involvement and professionalized staff can “crowd out” private organizations and volunteers from providing public and social services.

This study uses the World Development Indicators collected by the World Bank for 2000 to test the influence of most of these alternative variables on rates of volunteering. Education is measured as the net percentage of secondary-school enrollment in the country. Income is measured as per capita GDP (in constant 1995 U.S. dollars). Urbanization is measured as the percentage of the total population in urban areas. The percentage of the labor force that is female is used as a proxy for the prevalence of dual-income families. Government spending as a percentage of GDP (in constant 1995 U.S. dollars) is used as a proxy for the extent of government spending that could



be supporting (or crowding out) volunteer participation.<sup>10</sup> Finally, because a number of the organizations (i.e., Scouting International, PTAs, and YMCA) are specifically geared toward youth, a control variable—the percentage of the population younger than 15—is added to the regressions as a control (data also from the World Development Indicators).

The following regressions (Tables 2 and 3 below) include my choice independent variable—citizen attitudes about governmental and individual responsibility for dealing with social problems—with all of the alternative explanatory variables (education, income, working women, government spending, and urbanization) testing how well these variables explain the cross-national variation in eight different organizations found around the world. Three organizations represent embedded groups: PTAs, Red Cross, and volunteer firefighters. Five organizations represent nonembedded groups: Greenpeace, Lions Clubs International, Rotary Club International, Scouting International, and YMCA.

Data from more than 20 countries were available for only three of the groups: Scouting International, YMCA, and Red Cross. Table 2 lists the regressions for these three organizations. Because of the high correlation between education and youth in the two regressions that use youth as a control variable, the education variable (which was statistically insignificant) has been removed.

For the remaining five organizations, membership information from only a relatively small number of countries was available. Membership numbers for these organizations come from OECD countries and, therefore, represent a comparatively higher socioeconomic status than the larger pool of countries. Degrees of freedom considerations and multicollinearity problems necessitated, in some cases, the removal of some explanatory variables that were of limited theoretical significance and no statistical significance from the regression model. The results, reported in Table 3, should be treated with caution and should be viewed only as preliminary evidence in support of the hypotheses because of the small sample size.

## Results

Citizen attitudes toward governmental and individual responsibility for dealing with social problems have been demonstrated to be a very powerful predictor of the types of volunteer organizations prevalent in a country. The

10. Per capita government spending was too highly correlated with per capita GDP (Pearson's bivariate correlation = 0.986\*\*) to be a useful measurement of government spending in the regression.

**Table 2**  
**Factors Influencing Voluntary Membership Around the World ( $n > 20$ )**

	Scouting International		YMCA <sup>a,b</sup>		Red Cross	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<b>Attitude of government responsibility</b>						
Per capita GDP	<b>-14.947**</b>	<b>6.883</b>	-2.289	2.079	<b>123.871**</b>	<b>60.074</b>
Education	0.000	0.000	0.000**	0.000	0.001	0.001
Government spending	—	—	—	—	61.679	54.200
Working women	<b>-24.485*</b>	<b>14.459</b>	-2.343	5.044	106.351	164.170
Urbanization	-24.485	14.459	3.231	5.155	-10.715	149.979
Youth (as a control)	-2.041	6.437	-0.914	1.863	18.804	66.636
Adjusted $R^2$	19.040	14.396	4.946	4.138	NA	
$n$	0.081		0.488		0.051	
	59		30		44	

Note: Entries are ordinary least squares estimates (unstandardized coefficients). Embedded organizations and the hypothesized variable are in bold for easy reference.

a. The log of the per capita membership was used for these organizations to address heteroskedasticity problems.

b. A dummy variable was added for the United States and Canada because they are outliers; unstandardized coefficient = 3.365 (error = 1.062); significant to  $p = 0.004$ .

\* $p \leq 0.1$ . \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ . \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

**Table 3**  
**Factors Influencing Voluntary Membership in OECD Countries ( $n < 20$ )**

	Greenepeace <sup>a</sup>		Lions <sup>a</sup>		Rotary		Scouting International		YMCA <sup>a,b</sup>		Parent-Teacher Association		Red Cross		Volunteer Firefighters	
	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error	Coefficient	Standard Error
<b>Government responsibility</b>	<b>-11.688**</b>	<b>4.294</b>	<b>-4.093*</b>	<b>1.582</b>	<b>6.516</b>	<b>3.637</b>	<b>-11.656*</b>	<b>6.718</b>	<b>-9.925*</b>	<b>4.887</b>	<b>-207.463</b>	<b>149.033</b>	<b>228.052**</b>	<b>83.473</b>	<b>162.327*</b>	<b>53.158</b>
Per capita GDP	0.000	0.000	<b>0.000**</b>	<b>0.000</b>	0.000	0.000	<b>0.000*</b>	<b>0.000</b>	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.001	<b>0.002*</b>	<b>0.001</b>	-0.001	0.000
Education	8.617	7.558	—	—	-13.281	6.682	—	—	—	—	—	—	49.967	151.603	<b>-366.496**</b>	<b>112.711</b>
Government spending	15.667	15.684	-1.561	6.440	22.465	12.046	<b>-72.553**</b>	<b>27.029</b>	-18.002	22.294	-1045.350	547.965	-44.879	281.861	<b>306.372*</b>	<b>109.944</b>
Working women	-30.608	17.684	—	—	30.920	13.088	<b>51.967**</b>	<b>23.150</b>	4.966	19.136	<b>124.983</b>	<b>558.090</b>	<b>337.503</b>	<b>287.902</b>	—	—
Urban	0.690	4.590	-8.929	2.650	2.685	3.735	8.735	8.105	<b>-9.169*</b>	<b>4.242</b>	—	—	66.143	92.000	—	—
Youth	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	19.245	20.826	-15.886	40.440	96.602	106.592	NA	NA	NA	NA
Adjusted $R^2$	0.462	0.845	0.460	0.387	0.460	0.387	0.387	0.569	0.569	0.134	0.134	0.451	0.451	0.451	0.639	0.639
$n$	13	8	8	8	8	8	26	13	13	10	10	20	20	20	8	8

Note: Entries are ordinary least squares estimate (unstandardized coefficients). Embedded organizations and the hypothesized variable are in bold for easy reference.

a. The log of the per capita membership was used for these organizations to address heteroskedasticity problems.

b. A dummy variable was added for the United States and Canada because they are outliers; unstandardized coefficient = 3.438 (error = 1.670); significant to  $p = 0.095$ .

\* $p \leq 0.1$ . \*\* $p \leq 0.05$ . \*\*\* $p \leq 0.01$ .

**Table 4**  
**Cross-National Comparison of Volunteering Patterns**

Participation in Nonembedded Organizations	Participation in Embedded Organizations	
	High	Low
High	Finland, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland	Australia, United States
Low	Germany, Japan, Korea, Spain	Mexico, Poland, Turkey

coefficient is statistically significant in 8 of 11 regressions. In all cases, the effect was in the expected direction—attitudes of government responsibility were positively associated with participation in embedded organizations (Red Cross and volunteer fire departments) and negatively associated with participation in nonembedded organizations (Greenpeace, Lions Clubs, Scouting International, and YMCA).

The contribution of alternative explanatory variables in explaining the variation of the volunteer participation was minimal. The urbanization and working-women variables were statistically significant for only one organization each. Urbanization was negatively related to participation in YMCAs in OECD countries, and the percentage of women in the workforce was positively related to participation in Scouting International—neither urbanization nor women in the workforce was significant in the larger-*n* regressions.

Surprisingly, education was statistically significant for only one organization—volunteer firefighters—and for that organization, it was *negatively* related to participation. That is, countries with lower levels of education tended to volunteer more. Government spending fared slightly better; it was statistically significant in three regressions (2 of 8 organizations). Countries with high levels of government spending tended to have higher participation in volunteer fire departments but lower participation in Scouting International (for both OECD and larger-*n* groups of countries). Income was statistically significant in four regressions (4 organizations). Among OECD countries, it was significant for Lions Clubs, Scouting International, and Red Cross, and in the larger-*n* regression, it was significant for YMCA. In all cases, higher income was associated with higher participation, but the coefficient was miniscule, indicating that although its influence was statistically significant, the effect was very small.

The average rates of participation for each of the two types of organizations in the 12 OECD countries can be roughly divided into four groups as is illustrated in Table 4. For the majority of the cases, citizen attitudes

toward governmental and individual responsibility correctly predicted in which of the four boxes the country would fall. An interesting exception is Germany—German respondents tend to have strong attitudes of individual responsibility and weak attitudes of governmental responsibility much like Americans, but their volunteering patterns are much closer to the Japanese, with high participation in embedded organizations and relatively low participation in nonembedded organizations. It is not clear why Germany is an anomaly, although it could be an artifact of reunification. East Germans tend to have much stronger attitudes of government responsibility, and West Germans tend to have strong attitudes of individual responsibility according to the 1995 WVS, which collected data on the two regions separately.

## Discussion

This article has made one empirical and one theoretical claim. The empirical claim is that Japan is a nation of joiners and that its pattern of volunteer participation in embedded rather than nonembedded organizations is not unique but is shared by several other countries, such as Germany and Spain. The theoretical claim is that citizen attitudes, not individual characteristics or demographic factors or government policy, account for this pattern of participation.

Although much of the comparative civil-society literature acknowledges that embedded organizations exist, this article takes their presence seriously and demonstrates that there is considerable variation in the size of these types of organizations across countries. This finding raises additional questions about how to characterize and define the full range of volunteer organizations, particularly in cross-cultural research. It also suggests that embedded organizations as well as nonembedded ones may have an important role in affecting government policy, which needs to be explored.

For example, in investigating embeddedness, researchers could ask, Do countries with many embedded organizations have different kinds of policies toward the environment, community development, or social welfare than do countries with fewer embedded organizations? Do organizations that are embedded in the local government but nonembedded at the national level act differently than do organizations that are embedded in a national government but nonembedded at the local level? Under what conditions are embedded organizations more or less effective than nonembedded organizations in achieving policy goals? Why would an organization choose to become embedded with the government; under what conditions would it elect not to become embedded? These questions go to the heart of how citizen activism can be effective in influencing government policy.

These questions are most often asked in the context of a democratic policy, but one of the benefits of including embedded organizations in comparative research is that it provides scholars of comparative civil society a fruitful avenue of inquiry into the politics of non- and quasi-democracies. Many of these countries have civic organizations that are embedded in the government: To what extent are these organizations able to act as advocates for their members and communities? To what extent do the organizations merely mask government control? Recent research on the civil societies in the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and Asia has started to ask these important questions (e.g., Ekiert & Kubik, 1999; Frolic, 1997; Shue, 1997; Stroschein, 2002; Toprak, 1996; Wiktorowicz, 2000).

If community attitudes affect the types of volunteer organizations that citizens support, as the findings of this article suggest, then there may be significant ramifications for the ways that we think about the interaction between government policies and civic organizations. Whereas a number of studies have classified the different kinds of nonprofits that work with governments (e.g., Kramer, 1981), the research reported here suggests *why* certain kinds of organizations thrive or languish in different countries. Citizen attitudes about governmental and individual responsibility help determine the kinds of volunteer organizations they support. Policies that rely on organizations that are in line with these attitudes should succeed; incompatible policies are likely to fail. Further research to refine the theory and specify the conditions under which policies will be supported by civil society should enhance the ability of policy makers to create effective responses to citizen needs.

This article has demonstrated that the underlying assumptions of many current theories of comparative civil society are inaccurate. Most of the world does not participate in civic associations in the same way that Americans do, and the differences are not just in volume; they are in type. In many countries, the nonembedded organizations that use overtly political methods of advocacy—lobbying politicians, mass public relations campaigns, or legal battles, which are the most common in the United States—are quite rare. In these countries, embedded organizations that work closely with bureaucrats in making and implementing policy are often the most prevalent. Furthermore, factors that predict volunteer participation at the individual level, such as education and income level, do not predict patterns of volunteering when the analysis is at the country level. Rather, citizen attitudes about the appropriate roles of individuals and government predict the kinds of volunteer organizations that are prevalent in a given country.

For studies of civil society to be relevant outside the relatively few countries that have volunteering patterns similar to the United States, they must take embedded organizations and citizen attitudes about civic responsibility

seriously and incorporate them in their research. Doing so will not only increase our understanding of how citizens mobilize to affect changes in government policies but also create a new set of possibilities for state-society cooperation in addressing social problems in both advanced and developing democracies.

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