

Voluntary Associations and Social Capital Among the Homeless: A Study of the Political Implications of Client-Status

The invisible cords of social capital tie societal networks together and drive daily interactions between citizens; these bonds also draw together the social and political realms in ways that, while often unintentional, are beneficial to both. One of the first to observe social capital in the United States was Alexis de Tocqueville (1840), who saw the interactions between Americans of different social classes as a force for shaping the political and social norms of the day. His early observations continue to shape the work of political scientists and their studies of social connections as they relate to political participation.

I frame my research around social capital and voluntary associations, and ask if a relationship exists between client-organization associations, political participation, and social capital? If so, what is the nature of that relationship? I use both original and previously collected data to measure levels of social capital and political participation in a population of predominantly homeless clients. With two independent variables measuring the number of voluntary organizations a respondent is associated with and length of association with an organization, I test the relationship between voluntary associations, social capital, and political participation in two groups of respondents (volunteers and clients) engaged in voluntary associations. I find that while volunteers have higher levels of political participation and social capital, clients are more interested in politics. Both groups have positive relationships between number of voluntary associations and social capital and political participation. Before discussing these findings more in depth, I begin with an examination of the existing literature on political participation, voluntary associations, and social capital.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

Political participation is defined by Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) as “action directed explicitly toward influencing the distribution of social goods and values” (4). This definition is broader than others that specifically define political participation, for example, as “acts that aim at influencing the government, either by affecting the choice of government personnel or by affecting the choices made by government personnel” (Verba and Nie 1972, 2). By either of these definitions, though, there is a thoroughly documented positive relationship between political participation and socioeconomic status; that is, that as socioeconomic status or income increases so too does political participation (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Scholzman 2005; Scholzman et al. 2012).

The stratification of income and socioeconomic status in the United States has led to a persistent inequality in levels of political participation and activity over the last fifty years, with those Americans in the highest socioeconomic levels out participating those in the lower levels (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Scholzman 2005; Scholzman et al. 2012). The inequality in participation stretches across multiple aspects of political participation, and the highest socioeconomic quintile is more active in electoral activities for local, national, presidential elections and also more engaged in political activities like contacting elected officials, discussing politics on a daily basis, and participating in boycotts (Scholzman et al. 2012). In both presidential and midterm election years, the wealthiest Americans are more likely to vote, talk to others about voting, and become engaged in campaign work. These disparities in activity are attributed predominantly to a resource gap; this includes income, education, and experience, resources which can influence the time, skills, and other material needs (like transportation) that may be required to participate in politics. The socioeconomic disparity in political activity is also attributed to the greater variety of social

networks available to citizens of higher socioeconomic status (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). These social networks “expose them to indirect mobilization and provide them with social rewards if they take part” (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003, 134). Such social networks can be composed of voluntary associations that over time will generate social capital. Voluntary associations are also indicators of increased political participation and will be discussed in greater detail in a later section (Baumgartner and Walker 1988).

Contrary to these studies showing a decrease in political participation as socioeconomic status decreases, Lawless and Fox (2001) find in a study of political participation among the urban poor that as degree of economic hardship increases, so too does the probability of voting. Rather than survey respondents from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds, Lawless and Fox (2001) pull their respondents from a program designed to develop workforce skills; they are all likely of low socioeconomic status. This research indicates that there is still much to study in regards to political participation within isolated socioeconomic levels. In a limited socioeconomic window, there are variations in participation than cannot be perceived in the aggregate, and thus changing the frame of reference for political participation may also change how inequalities in political participation are perceived and the methods developed to rectify these inequalities.

VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS

A non-political voluntary association is described by Verba et al. (1995) as a social interaction that an individual enters into willingly, with no compensation. It may include formal membership, monetary contributions, or volunteer work for an organization. These voluntary associations operate outside of politics but have been shown to increase political participation

(Baumgartner and Walker 1988; Verba et al. 1995). These positive effects on the political behavior of those who enter into voluntary associations occur for several reasons.

First, individuals who volunteer are not only more engaged in politics but are also overall more engaged in their communities, donating to charity, donating blood, and serving on juries in higher rates than those who are not volunteers. Trust becomes a force of social capital, encouraging more civic activity and perpetuating a reinforcing cycle in the process (Putnam 2000). There is not a definite cause or effect in this relationship, though, and Putnam (2000) argues that volunteer positions may naturally in draw those who are more trusting, less cynical, and have the capacity to build lasting social capital. Another theory suggests that those who volunteer may self-select themselves for such positions and outlast former volunteers who are not as trusting (Bekkers 2012). Though trust-in-others is not the same as trust-in-government, an increase in trust-in-others has been show to be an indicator of increased participation in the political system (Putnam 2000).

Second, voluntary associations, even if of a non-political nature, often engage their members, contributors, and volunteers directly in a political cause, bring them into contact with political recruiters, or join them in an organization that may become target from which politicians can mobilize potential activists (Brady et al. 1999; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003).

Third, voluntary associations have the potential to build civic skills that may not be developed in individuals who are unaffiliated. Skills used in a non-political setting have potential in political activity, and Verba et al. (1995) write that, “undertaking activities that themselves have nothing to do with politics – for example, running the PTA fund drive or managing the church soup kitchen – can develop organizational and communications skills that are transferable

to politics” (40). Practicing public speaking, letter writing, and meeting organization all have a practical and positive effect when applied to political participation (Verba et al. 1995).

Finally, the social rewards and exposure provided by voluntary associations encourage more political activity and greater community involvement on the part of participants. The more associations an individual is involved in, the more people and ideas to which he or she is exposed and the greater solidary social rewards for political participation. The relationships built through these associations and social networks can pressure individuals to participate in ways they may not have considered prior to involvement (Baumgartner and Walker 1988; Verba et al. 1995; Brady et al. 1999; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003).

A case is made for further investigation into voluntary associations through nonprofit organizations in the work of LeRoux (2007). She finds that not-for-profit organizations have the ability to work as “civic intermediaries;” they are able to function as a linkage between their clients and government officials and agencies (LeRoux 2007, 418). Clarke (2001) and Salamon (1981) similarly argue that non-profit organizations, specifically those based on membership, “can provide opportunities for marginalized groups to develop [civic] skills and to link these skills with the political process” in ways of which they may otherwise be deprived (Clarke 2001, 3). Voluntary associations are not limited by socioeconomic status and can be a springboard for political mobilization.

Brady et al. (1995) argue, though, that organizational affiliations are not influential on political participation when taking resource depravity (money and time) into account. They find that civic skills are a more influential factor on political participation, but they do not take into account that civic skills may be created through organizational activities and to what degree these skills may influence political participation (Brady et al. 1995).

Stolle (1998) investigates trust within voluntary associations in Germany and Sweden, finding that a longer length of membership with a voluntary association does not create higher levels of trust. There is a boost in trust within one year of association and another between 5 and 7 years of association – after this point, trust declines, though not below the respondent’s initial level upon joining the association. Studying associations with both low and high levels of community engagement, no linear relationship is found between trust and length of association (Stolle 1998). While not directly contradicting Putnam (2000), who finds trust increases with great civic engagement; the research of Stolle (1998) highlights the need to further differentiate the effects of length or duration of voluntary association from number of voluntary associations in which a respondent engages.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

The most established source on social capital is Robert Putnam (2000), who argues that social capital in the United States has decreased over the last fifty years due to a decline in social involvement (including voluntary associations). He defines social capital as the “connections among individuals –social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (Putnam 2000, 19). Social capital should not be confused with civic virtue, and for Putnam (2000) it consists of several components that may influence a political system but operate outside of it. He focuses predominantly on the link between social organizations and social capital – as Americans engage more with social organizations (e.g. book clubs, recreational sport leagues, or service groups) their levels of social capital (e.g. trust, reciprocity, and efficacy) also increase. For example –volunteers are more trusting in others than non-volunteers and have greater interest in politics; they are more likely to continue to volunteer, which reinforces their production of social capital (Putnam 2000).

The most important conclusion Putnam (2000) draws in regards to political participation is its connection to social capital and voluntary associations. Because social capital is created through voluntary associations and social networks, involvement in these institutions is crucial to political participation. Verba et al. (1995) and Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) support this connection, as both sets of authors find that political mobilization increases with institutional affiliation or voluntary associations. In one study, respondents who were affiliated with a non-political organization were more likely than those unaffiliated to vote, to be asked to take political action, and to have informal political discussion at an organizational meeting (Verba et al. 1995).

From a sociological perspective, James Coleman (1988; 1990) writes of the importance of social capital in directing and facilitating social interactions in a society. He defines social capital as “not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: they all consist of some aspect of a social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure” (Coleman 1990, 302). He further notes that social capital, while not always tangible, allows for the attainment of objectives not otherwise achievable – I would argue that social capital is not a definitive means of achieving an end, but a facilitator that is one of several factors, including resources, that may affect an ultimate outcome.

While Putnam (2000) focuses on the importance of the individual in generating his or her own social capital through relationships and personal activities, Coleman (1988; 1990) acknowledges the impact of social networks. According to this line of thought (an idea that this paper builds on) social organizations may be constructed to function with one specific intention, but in the process facilitate other purposes in a community – particularly the generation of social capital outside of the organization (Coleman 1988; 1990; Walker 2008). Thus, an organization or voluntary association with the intent to provide income assistance, a type of physical capital,

might also generate social capital between its clients and staff, while also encouraging greater political awareness or participation.

CRITIQUES OF ROBERT PUTNAM

Though Robert Putnam (2000) creates a solid foundation of research regarding social capital, several authors have critiqued his work for selective gaps and distinctions left unexplored. One particularly relevant critique regards Putnam's lack of discussion of inequality. Fried (2002) notes the emphasis Tocqueville (1840), whose work Putnam cites as the basis for his inquiries into social capital, places on equality in his contemporary view of the American political system. Putnam glosses over noted political and social inequalities in in the United States and their impact on social capital in favor of measuring change in civic life over time. He also does not posit any implications these inequalities may have on social capital. Further, Fried (2002) writes that Putnam makes the mistake of appearing to hold all organizations equal. Using an example from Schlozman et al. (1999), Fried (2002) notes that though churches and unions may both offer opportunities to generate social capital, their influences are not necessarily equal nor are the populations that they serve the same. Opportunities to build social capital do not exist equally amongst socioeconomic levels, and Putnam skims over that fact (Fried 2002).

Similarly lamenting Putnam's (2000) lack of regard for structural factors that may inhibit civic engagement and social capital, Alex-Assensoh (2002) finds that black and white individuals living in high-poverty areas are less likely to engage in political participation than those in low poverty neighborhoods, though residents of high-poverty neighborhoods have higher levels of contacting elected officials and discussing politics with other residents. Her research calls for more in-depth inquiries into the situational and structural factors, like income,

that may influence various factors of the relationship between political participation and social capital.

Schultz (2002) examines the role of voluntary associations and social capital in stabilizing democracies, and he advocates for a structural examination of social capital rather than Putnam's (2000) focus on the individual. That is, how does social capital influence the norms of a society and how does social capital vary across society? Putnam (2000) presents evidence that there has been a decline in American social capital from the second half of the twentieth century through the present time, but he does not explore the systemic causes of that decline or the social values of organizations in various areas of society. Schultz (2002) argues that this overlooks the structural forces and implications of social capital on the greater American democracy and again leaves the question of inequality untouched.

Ayala (2000) makes a critique of Verba et al (1995) that is also relevant to the work of Putnam. He presents a case for the differentiation of classifications of voluntary activity when he subdivides voluntary associations into affiliations with non-political organizations and relationships in the workplace. He finds non-political organization affiliations to be a stronger predictor of political activity than workplace associations. This research is important, because it indicates, as do several previously mentioned authors, that there is a need for further subdivision and investigation of individual factors, like specific types of voluntary associations, in regards to social capital, particularly related to political activity.

Based on the existing research and literature on political activity and voluntary associations, as well as the critiques of Robert Putnam's work on social capital, I ask in this paper if there is a relationship between client-organization associations, political activity, and

social capital? If so, what is the nature of that relationship, and how does it compare to the existing research regarding volunteerism as a voluntary association?

HYPOTHESES

My hypotheses center foremost around a more expansive definition of “voluntary association.” For this paper, that definition will include the three characteristics described by Verba et al. (1995), membership, contribution, volunteerism, in addition to client-status. Verba et al. (1995) and Putnam (2000) both write of the frequency of volunteerism in the United States, but these authors fail to acknowledge that if people are volunteering, there must be a portion of the public who are recipients of this volunteer work. These individuals are clients. While the existing research explicates many aspects of voluntary associations, it overgeneralizes the complexity of membership within that broad category, as several authors have also argued (Fried 2002; Alex-Assensoh 2002).

“Membership” is a vague term, and one that is never explicitly outlined in the work of Verba et al. (1995), but it is assumed to be related to formal registration or meeting attendance. This assumption overlooks other forms of membership, particularly among individuals who may have interaction with an organization (regularly or in one instance), yet not be considered a formal part of the organization. For example, an individual who attends a free, weekly lunch at a local church may not be considered a church member, but he or she still forms social networks with the volunteers with whom he or she interacts. The scope of analysis to date is limited by examining only the relationships between volunteers and organizations, not recognizing the client-organization relationships that would still fall within the definition of voluntary associations (Putnam 2000).

While survey respondents are often asked about their volunteering and contributing habits, they are not asked if they have interacted with an organization (or one of its volunteers) as a recipient of a private contribution, which could take the form of a temporal, monetary, or material donation. For example, these studies (American National Election Study 2012; General Social Survey 2012) ask if a respondent has volunteered or donated to a food bank, but not if he or she has received a donation from a food bank. These relationships are of a different nature, but in both instances, they are associational and voluntary -- Walzer (2004) defines involuntary associations by four certain constraints: familial, cultural, political, or moral determinations -- clients are not restricted by any of these boundaries.

Studies conducted thus far have disregarded the client in their analyses of voluntary associations, while concluding that traditional organization association and political participation are positively related (Baumgartner and Walker 1988; Verba et al. 1995; Putnam 2000; Clarke 2001). These researchers have left out a segment of the population as they study associations and political participation, especially when considering socioeconomic inequality within the political system. The profile Putnam (2000) gives of those most likely to engage in altruism or organizational association also fits the profile Scholzman et al. (2012) create of those most likely to engage in political activity -- older or retired and of high and stable socioeconomic status. Essentially, the same types of individuals are being surveyed when their political behavior in relation to voluntary associations is already well documented. By examining individuals in a client position, it may be possible to understand if voluntary associations have a role in mobilizing individuals of lower socioeconomic status.

Based on this broader definition of voluntary associations, and also recognizing the impact of socioeconomic status on political activity, I first hypothesize that in a study of clients

of a non-political, non-profit organization, these clients will have levels of social capital (measured in trust and political efficacy) and political participation (voter registration, voting, seeking out political information, and discussing politics) lower than individuals who have a traditional association (in this case, volunteerism) with a non-political organization. Clients are of lower socioeconomic status than volunteers in this study, and I hypothesize they will participate less due to resource barriers (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1993; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Scholzman et al. 2012).

Second, I hypothesize that clients' political activity (measured in voter registration, voting, voter recruitment, and discussing politics) and social capital (trust in others) will have a positive relationship with both length of association with the surveyed organization and the number of voluntary associations held by a client. Viewing volunteerism and client status as two similar voluntary associations, I believe that their relationships to social capital will be parallel. Clients of non-political organizations, while in need of the service provided, seek to engage with a private organization willingly. Although client-status may not have the same motivations as volunteerism, the types of organization I intend to examine (i.e. a street paper) does not provide a primary service, like a public winter shelter, that would draw clients out of basic necessity. Instead, these organizations supplement an existing lifestyle, with the intent of economic empowerment, but have rules and regulations to which the client must adhere. Ultimately, relationships with organizations like street papers or food banks are voluntary. Clients self-select the organization with which to associate, and potential clients exist who choose not to engage with the organization. As I have argued for the expansion of voluntary association to include clients, I also believe that while levels of participation between volunteers and clients may not be on par due to resource inequalities (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1993; Rosenstone and

Hansen 2003; Scholzman et al. 2012), the relationships between voluntary associations and political activity will be the same for clients as they have been documented for volunteers (Putnam 2000).

METHODOLOGY

The existing research on social capital, voluntary associations, and political behavior has a clear emphasis on surveying the volunteers, donors, and individuals of high socioeconomic status – there is a large amount of data collected from this population spanning several decades (see the American National Election Survey 2012, General Social Survey 2012, and Citizen Participation Study 1990). Missing from the existing studies is data gathered from the clients of non-profit, non-political organizations. Being unable to find an existing dataset that combined questions of political behavior, social capital, and voluntary associations with questions of client status, I have created a survey based on questions from the 2012 ANES intended for clients of a non-political, non-profit organization.

In order to survey social capital and political behavior from a client perspective, I selected an organization from which to survey clients with the potential to retain clients over a period of several years (in order to measure the effect of length of association) with a client base of low socioeconomic status. I chose a street paper, one of a number of “socially oriented companies that allow the homeless and the socially excluded to earn an income by selling the publications” (Magallanes-Blanco and Perez-Bermudez 2009, 655), which gave several advantages to the surveying process. Clients are individual contractors, but must come by the organization’s main office weekly to pick up new issues of the street paper to sell. The organization hosts a weekly meeting on Monday mornings to facilitate this process. While all clients are not required to attend, this meeting provided an opportunity to survey a large sample

of the organization's client population at one time. Per Coleman's (1988; 1990) observation that an organization without political intention may influence political participation, the chosen organization is an ideal place to measure political activity in a non-political setting.

The survey was announced at the beginning of the organization's Monday meeting, its first following the 2014 mid-term elections. As clients waited to buy papers, they were asked if they would be willing to take the survey; 59 surveys were returned from an estimated 80 clients present at the meeting, sampling from approximately 350 of the organization's clients. The process was incentivized, but at the request of the organization's Director of Vending, I did not announce these incentives to the respondents. They were anonymously distributed to ten random survey respondents at the end of the process.

By comparing data collected from clients and volunteers, I intend to take on the criticism of Putnam (2000), made by Fried (2002) and Alex-Assensoh (2002), that his research on social capital does not give enough attention to the variations of organizations, individual roles, and situational factors that may influence social capital. Comparing clients of the surveyed organization (all homeless or formerly homeless) and volunteers, who according to Putnam (2000) are of much higher socioeconomic status, I examine how social capital and political participation vary between these two types of voluntary association.

The ratio of volunteers to clients at the surveyed organization is low. Rather than sample volunteers from this organization, I instead use 2012 ANES data to isolate respondents whose reported volunteering in the past year. I then perform comparable tests on the 2,374 respondent sample. Note that volunteers were surveyed after a presidential election and clients after a mid-term election – the 2010 ANES did not ask questions regarding volunteerism after the 2010 election to offer a comparable data set from a mid-term election year.

I surveyed clients on questions that I divide into three categories for the purpose of data analysis: dependent variables, independent variables, and control variables. The survey also provided space for clients to give extended responses or comments. This paper will discuss the following variables:

Independent Variables	Number of Voluntary Associations and Length of Association with the Surveyed Organization
Dependent Variables	Voter Registration, Voting, Attention Paid to Politics, Discussion of Politics, Trust in Others, Trust in Government, and Feelings of Political Efficacy.
Control Variables	Age, Level of Education, and Race.

I have selected number of voluntary associations and length of association with the surveyed organization as independent variables to incorporate the findings of Putnam (2000) -- as number of voluntary associations increases so too does level of social capital and thus political participation as well – and Stolle (2005) – trust does not increase exponentially with length of association. By measuring the effect of these two factors on dependent variables of social capital and political participation, I will be able to determine which are significant.

The dependent variables I have chosen to measure (social capital and political participation) have equivalents in the work of Schlozman et al. (2012), Putnam (2000), Verba et al. (1995) or the 2012 ANES data that will allow for a comparison between my original data and established research.

The three control variables I have chosen are based on the findings of Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) and Schlozman et al. (2012) – both studies find that age, level of education, and race are influential factors on political participation. As age and education level increase, so too

does political participation; Schlozman et al. (2012) and Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) find this relationship in regards to several political activities, including voting and contacting an elected official. Putnam (2000) also finds volunteerism to be higher among older and more educated Americans. I control for race due to measured inequalities in political participation between racial groups (Schlozman et al. 2005), particularly whites and African-Americans, the two predominant racial groups surveyed.

After coding the collected data, I measure the frequency of each variable and perform multivariate regressions between independent variables and ordinal dependent variables and logistical regressions between independent variables and categorical dependent variables. I also perform identical regressions for each dependent variable in the absence of independent variables in order to determine the significance of my control variables under these conditions. The results that follow are a presentation of relationships between independent and dependent variables determined to be statistically significant.

RESULTS

Frequencies of Political Participation and Social Capital in Clients and Volunteers (Table 1)

Looking at the results of the frequencies presented in Table 1, the first hypothesis, that clients will have levels of social capital and political participation lower than individuals who are volunteers, is confirmed regarding political participation, trust in others, trust in government, political efficacy (with the exception of a belief that public officials do not care what respondents think). It is refuted regarding attention to politics and discussing politics. Ninety-two percent of volunteers report being registered to vote compared to 41 percent of clients; eighty-nine percent of volunteers report voting in that year's election compared to 23 percent of clients. Clients become more active, though, in political behaviors that can be conducted without additional

resources – 57 percent of clients report that they pay attention to politics “always” or “most of the time.” Thirty-three percent of volunteers report a similar level of attention. Similarly, clients report discussing politics with others more often – 60 percent said “frequently” or “sometimes” – compared to 42 percent of volunteers.

Brady et al. (1995) write that “most measures of psychological engagement with politics are, by their very nature, perilously close to activity itself. This makes them robust predictors of political participation but trivial (and possibly spurious) explanations for participation” (271). The results presented here about frequency of discussion in comparison to political participation indicate otherwise – clients appear to have a level of interest in politics that is not translated into political participation. In this instance, though, the disparity in participation is likely due to resource-based barriers to participation, particularly those that are often limited by socioeconomic status, e.g. time and skills needed to participate in politics (Schlozman et al. 2012; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). Volunteers are in possession of the time and ability (e.g. transportation), while clients are not.

These results also imply that while clients of this organization are not voting or registering to vote at the level of volunteers, they are certainly not disinterested in politics. Not only was there a distinct discrepancy between the reported percentages of clients voting or registering to vote and their frequencies of discussing or paying attention to politics, but clients also had a sizable advantage over volunteers in these latter two areas. This result is in contrast to the findings Schlozman et al. (2012) present on political discussion among five socioeconomic quintiles – that is, for Schlozman et al. (2012), respondents in the lowest quintile engage in less political discussion than those in any of the other four quintiles. While resources may act as a barrier to voting and other means political participation at the low socioeconomic level of most

clients surveyed, there are other barriers to participation to consider for this population; these will be discussed in greater detail in the conclusion. Clients are not prevented from discussing politics, though, and they express their interest in politics in a manner (discussion) that does require additional resources.

In regards to trust and political efficacy, clients are less trustful of others than are volunteers; 58 percent responded that they feel they can trust others “some of the time” or “never,” while 28 percent of volunteers express similar feelings. When asked if the government can be trusted to do what is right “always” or “most of the time,” only a 4-percentage point difference exists between clients (9 percent) and volunteers (13 percent). The two groups expressed equal belief that public officials don’t care much for what they think; 62 percent of both groups affirmed or strongly affirmed that sentiment. While resources have been shown to give those of higher socioeconomic status a greater voice in government and policy (Schlozman et al. 2012), the similar levels of political efficacy and trust-in-government in both groups indicate the resources do not completely alleviate those feelings of distrust or isolation from government.

Putnam (2000) finds that volunteers are more trusting than non-volunteers, and that finding is confirmed in these data (if strictly interpreted). Putnam does not offer any comparison of volunteers’ trust versus trust-in-others in socially engaged individuals, and so there is no direct equivalent to determine if this trend holds true with Putnam’s data. This higher trust reported in volunteers is reflective of their higher political participation, though low trust measured in clients is not indicative of a lack of interest or discussion of politics.

Table 1 – Comparison of Client and Volunteer Frequencies			
Respondent's Responses	Client (%)	Volunteer (%)	Difference (%)
Registered to Vote	41	92	-51
Voted	23	89	-66
Pays attention to politics always or most of the time	57	33	24
Frequently or sometimes discusses politics	60	42	18
Trusts others always or most of the time	21	47	-26
Trusts others some of the time or never	58	28	30
Trusts the government to do what is right always or most of the time	9	13	-4
Trusts the government to do what is right some of the time or never	79	61	18
Has a good understanding of political issues	70	79	-9
Believes public officials don't care much what they think	62	62	0
Believes they have a say in what government does	33	43	-10

Clients may not be participating in politics to the same degree as volunteers, but the data suggest that they are not apathetic toward politics and government. These findings indicate that there is legitimacy to the criticism of Fried (2002) and Alex-Assensoh (2002) who argue that through oversimplification and ignorance towards societal inequalities, Putnam (2000) has not created a thorough picture of social capital in relation to political participation in the United States. The findings also indicate that assuming political interest can be accurately translated into political participation is incorrect. In this case, political interest is certainly not an accurate measure of potential political participation as Brady et al. (1995) suggest it should be.

Both volunteers and clients are members of a voluntary association, and while volunteers demonstrated higher levels of political participation and trust-in-others than clients (inequalities than can be attributed to socioeconomic related resource deficiencies), further research should consider surveying not only clients and volunteers, but also a population of similar socioeconomic status to clients, but unaffiliated with voluntary associations. Through this type of comparison, it would be possible to determine how influential the voluntary association is on generating social capital and encouraging political participation in those of client-status.

Multivariate Tests for Clients (Table 2)

Partially confirming the second hypothesis, that clients' political activity and social capital will have a positive relationship with both variables of voluntary associations, the data show that amongst clients, voting, political discussion, and trust increase with number of associated organizations. Length of association with the surveyed organization was only significant for the frequency of discussion, in which there was a negative relationship. These tests look solely at clients and were not conducted on the 2012 ANES volunteer data, because the

positive relationship between voluntary associations (particularly volunteerism), social capital, and political activity has been documented across several studies (Putnam 2000; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Verba et al. 1995).

I find a positive and highly statistically significant relationship between voting and number of organizations with which a client was associated. No control variables were significant. Voting is measured on a 1-4 scale, 1 indicating that a client did not vote in the 2014 mid-term election and 4 indicating a client did vote. These results are complimentary to Putnam's (2000) findings on volunteers, who also experience an increase in voting with more community involvement and exposure to social networks; also supported is Rosenstone and Hansen's (2003) observation that political participation increases with a higher number of voluntary associations.

Number of associated organizations and length of association have conflicting effects on a respondent's frequency of political discussion; both measures are statistically significant, though length of association more so. For each additional organizational affiliation a respondent has, their frequency of discussion decreases 0.24 units on a scale of 1 (frequently) to 4 (never) – as respondents report more interaction with organizations, they report more discussion of political subject matters. In contrast, the longer a respondent reports being a client of the surveyed organization, the more their frequency of discussion decreases. For each additional year a client reported being associated with the organization, his or her frequency of discussion decreased by 0.318 units. No control variables were significant. Here, greater breadth of voluntary association may introduce a client to a wider social network and other individuals, with greater chance of encountering political activists and recruiters who may encourage political discussion (Brady et al. 1999; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). An association with one

organization that does not engage in political activity, though, provides little chance of increased political discussion over time if there is no opportunity for discussion.

Regressing trust in others with the number of organizations and length of association with the surveyed organization as independent variables, I find a positive and highly statistically significant relationship between trust and number of organizations. No control variables were significant. Trust is measured on a 1-5 scale, 1 indicating always trusting of others and 5 indicating never trusting of others.

Table 2 – Multivariate Tests for Clients			
	Voting	Frequency of Political Discussion	Trust in Others
Organizations	0.375 ***	-0.242 **	-0.324 ***
Length of Association	-0.083	0.318 ***	-0.069
Age	0.022	-0.063	-0.069
Race	0.163	-0.084	-0.147
Education	0.234	-0.870	0.134
Constant	1.253	2.750 ***	3.814 ***
* indicates a p-value less than 0.1, ** indicates a p-value less than 0.05, *** indicates a p-value less than 0.01.			

The decrease in trust the longer a client is associated with the surveyed organization is parallel to the work of Stolle (2001), who finds that trust increases only after the first and fifth year of volunteerism, with a drop off after seven years. Stolle (2001) looks exclusively at volunteers, though, and there are some noted socioeconomic differences between that set of respondents and the homeless or formerly homeless client population surveyed for this study. The longer a client has been associated with the surveyed organization is not an indication of

resource availability (as it might be for a volunteer who can sustain that relationship), but could be an indicator of chronic homelessness, financial instability, or dependence on non-profit organizations, factors which might decrease trust-in-others. Putnam's (2000) finding that an increase in organizational involvement will lead to an increase in trust is confirmed. Combined with the positive relationship between breadth of voluntary associations, voting, and political discussion, these findings support an argument for the importance of number of affiliated organizations to political participation, rather than length of association to single organization.

Logistical Tests for Clients (Table 3 and 4)

The second hypothesis, that clients' political activity and social capital will have a positive relationship with voluntary associations, is also partially confirmed by the logistical tests. The data show that amongst clients, voter registration increases with number of organizations. Length of association with the surveyed organization was significant for discussion of politics, in which there was a negative relationship and in which the number of organizations was not significant.

A client's predicted probability of being registered to vote, holding all other variables at their mean, increases 24 percentage points, from 29.9 percent to 54.3 percent, when he or she moves from one voluntary association to three voluntary associations (Table 3). As non-political voluntary associations increase, political activity does as well (Verba et al. 1995, Rosenstone and Hansen 2003), and this positive relationship is also found in the population of clients surveyed for this study. Coupled with the multivariate results, this supports my argument that the categorization of a voluntary association may be broader than what has been previously studied. Verba et al. (1995) find that institutional recruitment is highly statistically significant to political

activity; in this case, the parallel positive relationships between political participation, activity and number of organizations (in clients and volunteers) imply that organizational affiliation may act as a source of recruitment or “resource development” (339). This is another indication that the pressures of social interaction may increase political participation (Brady et al. 1999, Rosenstone and Hansen 2003), and is a testament to the importance of voluntary associations.

Table 3 – Probabilities for Clients by Number of Voluntary Associations		
	At One Voluntary Association	At Three Voluntary Associations
Register to Voter *	0.299	0.543
Discussion of Politics with Others	0.592	0.524
* indicates statistical significance		

The number of organizations a respondent reported associating with was not statistically significant to whether or not he or she reported discussing politics with friends, family or others. A respondent’s predicted probability of discussing politics, though, holding all other variables at their mean, decreases 58 percentage points, from 84.28 percent to 26.67 percent, when he or she moves from less than one year of affiliation with the surveyed organization to more than five years of association (Table 4).

Table 4– Probabilities for Clients by Length of Association		
	At One Year of Association or Less	At Five Years of Association or More
Register to Voter	0.460	0.445
Discussion of Politics with Others *	0.842	0.267
* indicates statistical significance		

These findings regarding if a client discusses politics are similar to those regarding how frequently a client discusses politics from the multivariate tests. Again, this indicates that length of association and number of organizations associated with are not interchangeable and do not translate into the same types of social capital or political participation (Stolle 2001).

Street papers are a source of empowerment and financial scaffolding for the homeless in a community, but they do not guarantee that a client will no longer be homeless or control for other contributing factors to homelessness outside of the organization (Magallanes-Blanco and Perez-Bermudez 2009). The psychological identities of the homeless become important here, and there are several periods of transitional behavior that homeless individuals exhibit as their length of homelessness increases, including distancing from the homeless identity, embracing the identity, and fictive storytelling. This last period, which usually occurs after more than four years of homelessness, is also an indication of distancing from the norms of society (Snow and Anderson 1987). It stands to reason, then, that a longer period of association with an organization could also mean a longer period of time experiencing homelessness, which perhaps is an indication of withdrawal from society and from opportunities for political discussion.

Control Variables Remain Insignificant

I retest my dependent variables in order to determine whether control variables that originally were not significant became significant in the absence of the independent variables. In tests of discussion of politics with others, frequency of discussion, and trust-in-others, no control variable becomes significant in the absence of the independent variables. Education becomes significant in regards to voting, and race becomes significant in regards to whether or not a respondent is registered to vote. In a study across multiple socioeconomic levels (like those of

Rosenstone and Hansen 2003 and Schlozman et al. 2012) these control variables are significant because of the diversity of their surveyed populations, particularly in economic backgrounds. The client population surveyed for this study is of low socioeconomic status, and resource limitations are likely to create some barrier to participation for most. Political participation and development of social capital are ultimately so limited in this group, that traditional control variables become insignificant. This finding mirrors that of Alex-Assensoh (2002), in her study of political participation in high-poverty communities – she finds, when isolating this socioeconomic level, some types of political participation (like contacting an elected official) are actually more common among poorer residents than their wealthier counterparts. Because the socioeconomic factors that usually influence political participation hold little significance in this client population, the approach to promoting more political participation must begin by alleviating non-traditional barriers and utilizing existing structures and organizations in local communities.

CONCLUSION

Rather than operate within the traditional definition of voluntary associations, this paper has expanded that definition to include client-status and finds that the positive relationship between voluntary associations, social capital, and political participation holds true with the more inclusive definition. I find that clients are less active than volunteers in politics when the activity requires additional resources, as do voting and registering to vote. Clients are more active discussers of politics, though, and also give greater attention to politics than volunteers. Trust is higher in volunteers than clients, but the two populations have similar levels of political efficacy. This confirms the first hypothesis, with the exception of political discussion.

There is a consistent positive relationship between number of organizations a client is associated with and several measures of political participation and social capital, including voter registration, voting, frequency of political discussion, and trust-in-others. A second independent variable, length of association, is only significant in negative relationships with political discussion. Overall, a broad number of voluntary associations is more important to generating trust and greater potential for political participation than a long-standing relationship with one organization. This confirms the second hypothesis regarding number of organizations with which a client is affiliated.

These findings contrast the conclusion drawn by Brady et al. (1995) find that “civic skills matter for political participation, not institutional involvements” (282) in resource-limited populations (they use broad measures of institutional involvement, including whether a respondent was working, retired, involved in church activities, or part of another organization). From their research, a respondent’s work status is the only statistically significant influence on political participation (Brady et al. 1995). Using a broader definition of voluntary association than those provided by Scholzman (2012), Putnam (2000), or Rosenstone and Hansen (2003), the positive relationships they find regarding voluntary associations, social capital, and political participation, hold true.

Looking specifically at the lack of statistical significance of control variables in these tests, variables that usually have an impact on political activity, the observations made in this paper have several implications. First, they reveal that barriers and restrictions to voting in this particular client population are so pronounced that normal control variables become insignificant, particularly the age and education factors that have been shown to influence political activity – individuals are more likely to be politically active as they age (with

diminishing returns after age 75) and as their level of education increases (Schlozman et al. 2012; Rosenstone and Hansen 2003). By looking at a population comprised entirely of those of low-socioeconomic status, control variables are only marginally significant at best.

Second, if race, education, or age are not restricting clients from participating, as might be assumed from a study across multiple socioeconomic levels, then there must be other barriers barring the way. Some of these variables are certainly related to resources like money or time (Rosenstone and Hansen 2003; Schlozman et al. 2012), but there may be other structural factors that act as impediments. Several clients indicated on their surveys that they had felony convictions that prevented them from registering to vote. Lack of proper government identification, a requirement to vote in the state of Tennessee, was also mentioned as an obstacle. I omitted a question regarding felony convictions from the survey in order to avoid making respondents uncomfortable or dissuading them from taking the survey. Considering such barriers to political activity, particularly to voting and voter registration, into consideration in future research of this population would create a fuller picture of the extent to which actual interest in politics and political activity differs by socioeconomic status. Clients are not unenthused about politics, and I argue do not need to be convinced to participate, but need the information and opportunity to do so.

Third, these barriers to participation are removable. Specifically, changes could be made to relax the mandated identification requirements for voter registration, give greater access to voting precincts, or elucidate the process of reinstating of the right to vote after a felony conviction. These activities revolve around access to information, time, and availability of transportation. My research also highlights the potential to use existing structures, organizations, and voluntary associations in a local community to promote greater social capital and political

participation for those associated with them. Examining the movement of an individual from the role of social joiner to political activist, Walker (2008) finds support for the unintentional mobilization among members of voluntary associations, particularly among members directly asked to engage in politics by another member. His results are indicative of the greater qualitative study that could be conducted on the relationships examined in this paper. If the positive relationship between breadth of organizational involvement as a client, political activity, and social capital can be confirmed, then what factors within these types of organizations facilitate greater political activity and social capital amongst clients? The benefits of voluntary associations are not only for those who volunteer or partake in leisurely activities. Those who use voluntary associations as clients receive more than material benefits from their interactions, and they also take away political and social rewards similar to those of higher socioeconomic status.

I have emphasized the ways in which clients involved in voluntary associations face more barriers to political participation than their volunteer counterparts but have the potential to reap the similar benefits from their associations, yet why is the political participation of this population important? Greater equality in the political system is an ideal to strive for on premise, but in the more immediate future, increased political participation from low-socioeconomic status clients is a means to increase government responsiveness and influence public policy. Americans of higher socioeconomic status are not only more active in electoral politics, but they are also more involved in campaign activity; thus, government responsiveness and policy outcomes are skewed towards those in favor of their policy preferences because they have the time and money to engage in political activity (Jacobs and Skocpol 2005; Scholzman et al. 2012).

While low-socioeconomic status clients may not be able to contribute to campaigns or volunteer at the rates of higher socioeconomic status Americans, all votes carry equal weight. It is in this electoral arena that their voices may be equally heard (Schlozman 2012). Particularly on the level of local government, greater influence from marginalized populations has the greatest potential for impact on policy decisions that may affect them. In a local election, clients have an opportunity to elect a councilperson or mayor who will make decisions on social programs and policies that may have an immediate impact on their wellbeing. With public officials held accountable to the needs and concerns of these clients, their marginalization in the political process can begin to ease.

Further study of the relationship between client-status and political participation is certainly needed; particularly in order to further define the impact voluntary associations have for those in the lowest socioeconomic levels. The importance of the voluntary associations cannot be denied, though, and nor is its impact only for those of privilege. Even those who are recipients of aid reap the benefits of social networks and interactions. The creation of social capital through organizational affiliation is usually unintentional (Coleman 1988; 1990), but by recognizing the power of voluntary associations in many different forms, it could be possible to use existing social connections to intentionally spur greater political activity in populations marginalized from the electorate.

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