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Political Participation of Ethnic Associations

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Differences in Resources, Motivation and
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Abstract

In this paper, we apply the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM) proposed by Verba, Scholzman and Brady on the organisational level. Simultaneously contributing to the research on the political integration of ethnic minorities, we examine resources, motivation and recruitment networks of ethnic associations, and probe the extent to which these mechanisms influence collectively organised political participation. We use data based on face to face interviews with representatives of 106 organisations of four different immigrant groups in Stockholm. Our results indicate that participation rates of ethnic associations vary with size, access to information technology, level of internal democracy, overall aspiration to influence society, and contacts with political elites. Noteworthy, however, our analyses suggest that members' proficiency in the Swedish language is not important in this respect. Conceptually and methodologically the study demonstrates how the CVM can be fruitfully applied when analysing differences in the political activity of voluntary associations.

Sammanfattning

I denna studie undersöker vi etniska föreningsars deltagande i det politiska livet. Framförallt söker vi efter faktorer som kan förklara skillnader i politisk aktivitetsgrad mellan sådana föreningar. Vi lånar en teoretisk modell, utvecklad för att belysa motsvarande skillnader på individnivå, och konstaterar att dess fokus på resurser, motivation och nätverk är fruktbart även då föreningar står i centrum för analysen. Studien baseras på intervjuer med företrädare för 106 föreningar, inriktade mot fyra olika invandrargrupper, i Stockholmsområdet: chilener, turkar, samt kurder respektive assyrier/syrianer med bakgrund i nuvarande Turkiet. Vi konstaterar att antalet medlemmar, tillgången till informationsteknologi, graden av intern demokrati, viljan att påverka i samhällsfrågor, och kontakter med politiska eliter påverkar i vilken grad en etnisk förening är politiskt aktiv. Intressant nog konstaterar vi emellertid också att medlemmarnas kunskaper i svenska språket inte har någon betydelse för politiskt deltagande på föreningsnivå.

Introduction

Citizens in a democratic society may take part in political life in various ways and configurations. Casting a vote on the election day is an individual act. Participating in a public demonstration, on the other hand, is normally a collective act (though individually conducted demonstrations occasionally take place). In this study, we examine a particular type of collectively oriented political activities, namely activities performed by voluntary associations. In so doing, we treat associations largely in the same manner as individual citizens would be treated in conventional analyses of political participation. Borrowing a theory developed to explain differences in individual level political participation, this study provides several answers to the question of why some voluntary associations are more politically active than others.

Previous research suggests that engagement in voluntary associations induces political involvement, even if the members of a particular club, league or society are glued together for strictly non-political reasons (Almond and Verba 1963; Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995; Kwak, Shah and Holbert 2004). Although the causal direction of this positive relationship is neither completely obvious nor straightforwardly verified (Leighley 1996; Ayala 2000; Teorell 2003; Jacobs, Phalet and Swyngedouw 2004), political participation research offers reasonable clues to explain why associational affiliation should encourage political activity. According to the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM), proposed by Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995; see also Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995), individual political participation is positively influenced by both endowments and ambitions. In brief, those who have *resources* that facilitate participation and those who are psychologically *motivated* to act politically are expected to be more engaged in political life. In addition, individuals are expected to participate more frequently if they have access to *political recruitment networks*, in which mobilisation takes place through explicit requests for political action (see also Brady, Schlozman and Verba 1999).

Although the positive effects of resources, motivation and recruitment networks are supported by empirical evidence (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, ch. 12–13; cf. Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001, pp. 33–38, ch. 10), analyses tend to leave presumably important collective level characteristics essentially uncharted. Fine-grained information concerning the organisational level as such is usually scarce. We contribute to this field of research by utilising detailed information on the kind of resources, motivation and recruitment networks that voluntary associations may possess (or produce), and probe the extent to which these elements influence their collectively organised political participation.¹

¹ Strömblad and Bengtsson (2009) sought to tackle the organisational level information deficit from a different angle, by investigating what they labelled the ‘political integration potential’ of ethnic organisations. Utilising the CVM logic to construct a model that integrates the organisational and individual level, they studied how

Focusing on organisational level participation, we concurrently aim to contribute to the research on the political integration of ethnic minorities. Numerous scholarly observations suggest that individuals of foreign origin residing in Western countries tend to be less active in political life than the native population (Togeby 2004; Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001, ch. 11; Fennema and Tillie 2001; Adman and Strömblad 2000; Bäck and Soininen 1998). In Sweden, which constitutes our empirical setting, high hopes have been built up on the possibilities for ethnic associations to contribute to political integration of immigrants (cf. Borevi 2002, ch. 4; Strömblad and Adman in-press). Considering previous theorising, this optimistic line of thought is not implausible. The argument, then, would be that social groups controlling less individual resources may be compensated in terms of political power if they have access to organisational resources (Verba, Nie and Kim 1978; cf. Leighley 2001, pp. 5–6). In view of this an obvious first step would be to map the conditions under which ethnic associations may at all function as political actors. For a pilot study of this kind, limited to one country and one specific collection of organisations, we thus find ethnically based voluntary associations to be particularly interesting.

In the remainder of the paper, we first proceed by elaborating our theoretical framework. Next, we provide information on data collection procedures and give a summary description of the associations participating in the study. In the section following, we go on to present our empirical analysis, and in the final section we conclude our findings, discuss the fruitfulness of our approach and propose questions for future research.

Civic Voluntarism in the Aggregate

According to the CVM, politically passive citizens lack necessary political resources, political motivation, and access to recruitment networks (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, ch. 10–13). In a conventional (i.e., individual level based) application of this model, voluntary associations are expected to provide resources which are of practical use in political life. Similarly, associational involvement may be expected to stimulate an interest in taking part in decision-making processes thus promoting a democratic spirit. In addition, members of voluntary associations may to a larger extent be considered as appropriate targets for politically mobilising efforts, thus more frequently receiving requests to participate in political activities.

In the analyses following, we seek to translate this model to the organisational level, thus investigating the ‘organisational counterparts’ of individual resources, motivation and recruitment networks—and

associations’ support to individual members and their direct political mobilisation of members could be linked to political activity on the collective level.

their possible effects on the political involvement of organisations.² Utilising the intuitively appealing logic of the CVM, we hypothesise that associational level political participation is promoted by resources as well as motivation. Paraphrasing Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995, p. 269) associations are likely to refrain from political involvement if they ‘can’t act’ or if they ‘don’t want to act’. Hence, all else being equal we assume that associations better endowed with resources facilitating participation are more energetic political actors, and that the same should be true for associations that strive for political influence and regard this as an important part of their overall mission. Furthermore, one may expect political recruitment networks to be important also on the collective level. Much like individuals, associations too may receive requests for political participation that encourage activity; they may for example, as collectives, be invited to take part in public demonstrations.

Still, using the general logic of the CVM, we do not literally translate each, originally proposed, sub-component to organisational equivalents. For instance, the specific resource of ‘time’ is clearly a theoretically relevant restriction on the individual level (cf. Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, pp. 289–291). People who have a lot of free time should, all else equal, be able to act politically more often than those who work double-time. However, translating the time factor to the associational level does not really make sense. The activities performed by associations may be more or less extensive, but we could hardly conclude that one association has more time available than another.³

‘Civic skills’, on the other hand, should be a resource of relevance to collective entities as well. The original theory claims that individuals who are well endowed with civic skills find it easier to take part in political life. They will know where to direct their claims, and they will be able to communicate their preferences effectively. Acknowledging that ‘organisations learn’ (Argyris and Schön 1978) there are good reasons to suspect analogous mechanisms on the associational level.

² Thus, in the analysis we regard associations as *political actors* in their own right, rather than as *arenas* providing members with tools and incentives that may promote individual participation. Adhering to the idea of methodological individualism, we realise that collective mechanisms ultimately should be deduced from individual motives and actions—though presumably not exactly the same motives and actions that are in focus in individual level analysis of political participation.

³ For the CVM resource component ‘money’ (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, pp. 289–291), the story is somewhat different. On the individual level, monetary assets are primarily important when variations in economic contributions (e.g., to political campaign funds) are to be explained (cf. Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, pp. 358–364). Associations may also make political donations, and some associations are indeed wealthier than others. Unfortunately, however, we are not able to efficiently probe the consequences of variations in this respect since, in the survey we use, no question was asked about the financial contributions made by the associations.

Similarly, ‘political motivation’ is also fully conceivable on the collective level. This could perhaps be regarded as the sum of active members’ motivation. But, we will rather argue that it should be at least as rewarding to examine what we shall call the ‘political mission’ of a given association; that is, the extent to which the members perceive their association as a natural base for opinion moulding and political action. Finally, acknowledging the reasonable occurrence—and importance—of networking also on the organisational level, we will consider contacts with political parties and their elected representatives as an equivalent of voluntary associations’ political recruitment networks.

In the traditional ‘organisations-as-arenas’ perspective, voluntary associations would be perceived as (potential) training grounds, mobilising camps and fishing ponds for recruiters. However, on the collective level, promoting the political competence and self-confidence of individual members, as well as inducing mutual trust and a cooperative spirit, are ultimately *unintended side effects* of what associations do within their respective substantial missions; such as negotiating cheap purchases, organising exciting sports events or collecting money for good causes.⁴ Certainly, some members may join an organisation with the intention of acquiring political skills—they might even regard their active membership as a springboard for a political career. Yet, in relation to the primary objective of the association, realising such ambitions would still be side effects.⁵

Applying the CVM on the organisational level means taking voluntary associations seriously as political actors – and as the political ‘weapon of the weak’, reducing political inequality in socio-economically stratified societies, that they are sometimes claimed to be (Michels 1962; Verba, Nie and Kim 1978, p. 15).⁶ Though the individual side effects may in principle be the result of participation in all types of organisations, the supply of utilities like administrative knowledge,

⁴ Warren (2001, pp. 123–133), presents an impressive theory-based list of such ‘constitutive goods of association’.

⁵ Elster (1983) is the classic work on states that are essentially unintended by-products, e.g. education and self-fulfilment as side effects of democratic procedures. Elster’s most important point is that if the intended effects are not produced there will probably be no positive by-products either. In our case this would mean that if organisations would not produce member utility, they would not—at least not in the long run—serve as training grounds, mobilising camps or fishing ponds either (cf. Bengtsson 2007).

⁶ While traditional CVM analysis of organisations, with its focus on the indirect political impact of organisations as arenas of social interaction, has its theoretical base in the Tocquevillian discourse on trust and social capital (Putnam 1993, 2000) and in the Millian discourse on organisations as schools of democracy and civic virtues (Almond and Verba 1963), the type of CVM analysis on the associational level that we carry out in this paper is more related to theoretical macro perspectives focusing on the direct impact of organisations as political actors, e.g. the discourses on civil society state relations (Linz and Stepan 1996), corporatism (Schmitter 1974) and political opportunity structures (Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1994). Although not further developed in this paper, we believe that an integration between our framework and these theoretical contributions would be fruitful.

awareness of social issues and interest in public matters is probably richer in some types of organisations than in others (cf. Warren 2001, p. 123; Kwak, Shah and Holbert 2004; Ayala 2000).

Such a difference should be even more obvious on the collective level, where one would expect the direct political effects to be stronger in organisations with a clear political mission. However, with a reasonably wide definition of politics, including all different types of activities aiming to improve the societal conditions of members, the range of associations that may be regarded as political would still be rather wide. We would certainly expect that associations organising people of foreign origin, which are in focus in this study, have the ambition – among other things – to improve their members' conditions in the host society.

After describing our empirical data, we specify a detailed set of indicators based on the above reasoning, and probe how these indicators are related to associational level political participation.

A Study on Ethnic Organisations

The data for this study were gathered in a survey of all associations that we were able to locate in the county of Stockholm organising either (1) Chileans, (2) Turks, (3) Kurds with a background from the present territory of Turkey, or (4) Syrian Christians with a background from the same territory.⁷

When designing the study, we had two main reasons for choosing associations organising immigrants with a background from Chile and Turkey (including Kurds and Syrian Christians from Turkish territory). First, Chile and Turkey are important countries of migration to Sweden and the Stockholm region. Secondly, since there have been considerable numbers of immigrants from Chile and Turkey in Sweden for more than three decades, we can assume that they have had the time and opportunity to create an associational life of some political importance. On the other hand we do not expect them to have reached such a degree of integration (or assimilation) that their ethnically based associations have lost their political relevance and turned into mere transmitters of tradition. Furthermore, the

⁷ The fieldwork was carried out in the Autumn of 2005 by professional interviewers from Statistics Sweden, as face-to-face interviews of on average 75 minutes. Questionnaires translated to (Chilean) Spanish, Turkish and Kurdish were available in case of language difficulties during the interviews. In total 106 interviews were completed, which represents a response rate of 87 per cent, about the same percentage in all four ethnic categories. In order to construct as complete a population as possible, the interviews were preceded by a period of three months when the associations were tracked down by two research assistants with Chilean and Turkish background respectively, and with good contacts in several ethnic communities.

causes of immigration from both Chile and Turkey are mixed, and the periods of immigration vary within both categories.⁸

Table 1. The sample of ethnic associations in this study

Ethnic category	Number of associations	Median number of members
Chilean	27	90
Turkish	35	277
Kurdish	26	125
Syrian Christian	18	540
Total sample	106	200

Table 1 provides a quick view of the investigated associations. One notices that the Turkish group is the strongest in terms of the number of interviewed associations, while the data set only contains approximately half as many Syrian Christian associations. The remaining two ethnic categories, Chileans and Kurds, are found in between, with virtually the same representation.

The figures describing the median size of the associations in terms of membership reveal that the collectives in focus must be considered as large. It should be noted, however, that the frequency distributions have a positively skewed pattern. In each of the four groups we find a tiny fraction of associations that are very large.

The primary activities stated by the organisations are summarised in table 2. The structure of this table is based on the total rank order of associational types mentioned by the respondents, but we may also compare the four ethnic categories in terms of their associations' primary activities (the figures given as percentages for each category).⁹ Although we are, on the whole, not able to discern any striking relationship between ethnic group and associational type, tables 1 and 2 taken together confirm that associations of this kind come in many shapes and sizes, and that they have quite differing substantial objectives. With this in mind, we move on to examine if there are also systematic differences in capabilities and incentives to take part in political life.

⁸ We also know from other research that both groups face prejudice and discrimination in the Swedish society (cf. Lange 1995; Myrberg 2007, ch. 3). Though it is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse differences between organisations with regard to the four ethnic groups, it should be mentioned that in earlier analyses of the data we found no reason to interpret the differences in political participation between organisations as purely culturally driven (cf. Strömblad and Bengtsson 2009).

⁹ The classification 'other club or association' is excluded from table 2. In total 9 respondents chose this option, as they did not find any of the 28 associational types suitable as descriptions. In these cases, the respondents were also asked to suggest their own classification, among which 'student association' was the most frequently mentioned.

Table 2. Primary activities of the associations

Type of association	Chilean (%)	Turkish (%)	Kurdish (%)	Syrian Christian (%)	Total sample (%)	Total sample (no. of assoc.)
Cultural society	22	14	31	44	25	27
Sports club	26	23	4	22	19	20
Immigrants' organisation	22	6	15	6	12	13
Youth association	0	20	0	22	10	11
Charity organisation	11	3	8	0	6	6
Women's organisation	0	6	12	0	5	5
Religious organisation	4	6	0	6	4	4
Pensioners' organisation	7	0	4	0	3	3
Humanitarian aid	0	0	8	0	2	2
Ethnic association	0	3	4	0	2	2
Political party	0	3	0	0	1	1
Business organisation	0	3	0	0	1	1
Hobby club	0	0	4	0	1	1
Residents' association	0	3	0	0	1	1

Explaining the political participation of ethnic associations

Although not entitled to vote in general elections, associations may indeed act in several ways to influence political processes and strive for changes in society. The survey tried to capture a number of such possibilities through a battery of questions on organisational activism. Respondents were asked to report how frequently their respective associations have performed different activities ('during the last 12 months') by using the response options 'never', '1–3 times', '4–6 times', or '7 times or more'.¹⁰

Table 3 displays a list of the specific activities thus recorded, with relative frequencies of each mode of participation. Specifically, the figures display the percentages of associations reporting that they have been active at least 1–3 times during the last 12 months.

Based on a dimensional analysis the political acts may be classified in two major categories, which we label *proclaiming* and *protesting*.¹¹ The former category embraces activities aiming at declaring an

¹⁰ Although we make frequent use of techniques that, in principle, require continuous measurements, we recognize that the two political participation indexes we construct are crude approximations of interval level variables. Hence, we have also estimated the statistical models using ordinal logistic regression, to control for possible bias due to response options not being ordered on equidistant scales. This did not result in any substantially different conclusions, however.

¹¹ The two-dimensional structure is based on the result from a principal-components factor analysis, rendering a two-factor solution with the conventional Kaiser criterion applied (i.e., retention of factors with Eigenvalues >

Table 3. Dimensions of associational level political participation

Proclaiming activities	Active associations (%)	Protesting activities	Active associations (%)
Send letters or writings to the authorities	74	Collect signatures for a petition	32
Administer press conferences or press releases	39	Organise demonstrations and public meetings	42
Management or implementation of public programs	71	Organise boycotts	9
Distribution of newsletter to influence public opinion	39		

association's point of view, assumingly with the intention to influence opinions. This may certainly be the aim of activities in the second category also, but the common denominator of protest-oriented acts is that they are more expressive manifestations; involving participation 'taken to the streets', rather than 'behind the desk'. Although this dichotomy may not always be clear-cut for each specific act that associations have actually performed, we consider the distinction to have some face validity, and it also appears to be empirically relevant. As we demonstrate later on, some organisational characteristics seem to affect the propensity to perform proclaiming political acts while being unrelated to protest-oriented means of participation.

In line with reasonable expectations (and analogous to what corresponding individual-level data would have shown) we notice that some political acts are far more common than others. The figures in table 3 reveal that a large majority of the studied associations (approximately three quarters) have sent letters to public authorities. Protesting by means of organising a boycott is, on the other hand, far less common; barely one in ten associations reports having been politically active in this way. Moreover, yet a significantly larger share of the associations organise demonstrations, the proclivity for protest-oriented political participation generally seems to be lower.¹²

In accordance with Verba, Scholzman and Brady's original analysis, we now proceed by means of a stepwise examination of how resources, motivation and recruitment networks affect associational level political participation. Although our main empirical assignment is to clarify the extent to which the three components of the CVM each have independent effects, we present several specifications before estimating a comprehensive model. By following this strategy we may scrutinise the importance of each set of variables more thoroughly. At the same we are able to keep better track of relationships

1). The item 'organise or participate in the occupation of a building or in a "lock-up"' was also included in this series of questions in the survey; however, no associations reported having participated in this particular way.

¹² Comparing relative frequencies for the additive indexes that we use from now on, we may also conclude that as many as 87 percent of the associations have been engaged at least in some kind of proclaiming, while the corresponding figure for protesting is 51 percent.

between the explanatory factors. The latter advantage is crucial, considering the difficulties to establish the accurate causal structure. In absence of dynamic data, we are obliged to use plausible arguments rather than statistical evidence in making inferences on, for example, how certain resources may benefit the development of political interest. By building increasingly more complex models we continually receive clues as we observe how relationships change through piecemeal modification. Hence, we may rule out some theoretical possibilities in favour of others.

The role of resources

We propose that a number of tangible as well as intangible properties may function as politically relevant resources for voluntary associations. *Tangible resources* include the human capital represented by the members themselves, and also some physical capital like technical equipment and space for activities. To perform any activity at all, an association needs members, and we find it reasonable to assume that larger associations with high memberships are generally more politically powerful. Among other things we would expect an association with many members to have access to a more diverse stock of competences and interfaces to society. This may, in turn, result in stronger perceptions of available opportunities and less restrictions to act politically. Considering space for activities, we hypothesise that a 'head-quarter', where administrative work can be done and members might show up spontaneously, may promote political discussion and participation. Furthermore we hypothesise that a well developed technical infrastructure would give associations a higher participatory potential, since coordination and distribution of information should require less efforts. Thus we consider variations between the associations when it comes to having direct access to information technology, such as fax machines, computers, internet connections and the like.

As for *intangible resources*, we first consider the internal democracy of the associations. Solid and respected democratic institutions (reflected, for instance, in the existence of statutes, general meetings and an elected board) and a democratic spirit, manifested by extensive member participation in internal decision-making ought to promote the political competence of the collective. If a large share of the members are active in democratic practices, the association as such would assumingly retain a greater reserve of recyclable skills that facilitate political participation.

As the associations that we investigate chiefly organise members of foreign background, we also find it reasonable to consider variations in language proficiency. A good command of the primary language of the country of residence is acknowledged by Verba, Schlozman and Brady (1995, pp. 304–308, 337–342) as an important indicator of civic skills, and previous research indicates that this is a powerful predictor of the political participation of immigrants in Sweden (Adman and Strömblad 2000, pp. 36–42). Hence, we hypothesise that a higher rate of political participation is found among ethnic associations whose members are able to communicate effectively in Swedish.

Table 4. Predicting associational level political participation by resources

Independent variables	Proclaiming activities				Protesting activities			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Tangible resources								
Size of association	.04	.06	.20***	.08	.05	.04	.14**	.06
Space for activities	.13	.13	.12	.13	.08	.09	.08	.10
Information technology	.28***	.09	.25***	.09	-.02	.07	-.03	.07
Intangible resources								
Internal democracy			1.08***	.31			.58**	.23
Swedish skills			-.003	.07			-.02	.05
(Constant)	.22	.27	-.95	.48	.05	.19	-.52	.36
<i>N</i> = 96	Adj. <i>R</i> ² .14		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .22		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .00		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .04	

Statistical significance: *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients (*B*), and standard errors (*SE B*). The *dependent variables* (proclaiming and protesting) are in both cases additive indexes based on the classification of items in Table 3, ranging from 0 (the association did not take part in any of the mentioned activities) to 3 (the association took part in all mentioned activities at least 7 times). *Size of association* refers to the total number of members, although a logarithmic transformation number is used in this case (assuming a decreasing marginal utility from increasing the number of members in already large associations). *Space for activities* is a dichotomy, taking the value 1 if the association has access to a regular space, and 0 otherwise. *Information technology* is a trichotomous variable taking the value 0 if the association has no equipment for information distribution of its own), 1 if the association has a single type of such equipment, and 2 if the association has several types of such equipment. *Internal democracy* denotes the proportion of members participating in the association's most recent general meeting; i.e. the values theoretically ranges from 0 to 1. *Swedish skills* is an index based on a series of questions on how frequently Swedish is used when activities of various kinds (such as regular activities, membership meetings and announcements) are conducted; the variable values range from 1 (all activities are exclusively conducted in the language of the ethnic group) to 5 (all activities are exclusively conducted in Swedish).

Amalgamating the reasoning above in regression equations, we estimate two resource models with each of our previously defined indexes of political participation as dependent variables. The results are reported in table 4.

Studying the regression coefficients denoting the effects of the tangible resources—size, space, and information technology—neither model 1 (in which proclaiming is the dependent variable) nor model 3 (in which protesting is the dependent variable) seems particularly enlightening. Yet almost all coefficients have expected signs, the only statistically significant effect is the positive impact of information technology on proclaiming activities. Since the acts assembled under this headline have communicative efforts in common, this result is quite in line with theoretical expectations. Both external and internal communication should be facilitated in associations that are well-off in terms of information technology. Yet, the other resource factors seem to be unrelated to associational level political participation.

As the other columns in the table make clear, however, such a conclusion does not hold when we also take the intangible resources into account. Controlling for differences in internal democracy and

Swedish skills, we now find that associational size does affect the propensity for associational political involvement, both in terms of proclaiming and protesting. Information technology still appears to be a significant predictor of proclaiming acts, while space for activities does not seem to make any difference.

A series of complementary analyses (not shown) clarify the seemingly contradictory findings in table 4. We find that size has a *direct positive effect* on political participation, but also an *indirect negative effect* through our measure of internal democracy. Consistent with expectations, internal democracy positively affects associational political participation. Associations where a larger proportion of members meet up at general meetings tend to raise their collective political voices more frequently in public. In larger associations, however, such internal mobilisation is harder to bring about. Consequently, although the net effect of size on participation is nil on average, the results also tell us that, for a given level of internal democracy, size matters in the way we thought it would, and vice versa. Failing to take internal democracy in account would thus conceal the positive effect of size, because larger associations in general provide less room for participative democracy.¹³

Contrary to expectations, the results in table 4 finally suggest that Swedish language skills is a poor predictor of associational level political participation. By and large, the ability to communicate in Swedish does not seem to make any difference for an association's capabilities to act politically.¹⁴ This result is interesting, not least considering that previous research on immigrants' political participation has provided strong evidence of the importance of proficiency in the primary language of the host country (Adman and Strömblad 2000, pp. 39–40; Berger, Galonska and Koopmans 2004, pp. 501–504; Jacobs, Phalet and Swyngedouw 2004, pp. 551–554). Although language proficiency may still be a crucial resource for individuals, our findings suggest that the political competence of ethnic associations does not depend on each member's skills in the language of the host country. One possibility—worth further empirical study—might be that ethnic associations only need a few active members with strong communicative skills in order to act as a politically energetic collective.

Incorporating motivation and recruitment networks

Continuing on our route guided by the CVM map, we now add collective level measures of motivation and recruitment networks to the resource factors that we have found influential. Regardless of resources, we may hardly expect any political activity in the absence of political interest, or some kind

¹³ This pattern indicates that smaller associations with a more vibrant internal democracy may serve better as schools of democracy on the *individual level* (indirect effect), whereas on the *collective level* large organisations may have more political influence (direct effect).

¹⁴ In this case we have not been able to trace any indirect relationships either. In fact, even in the absence of all other independent variables, Swedish skills on the collective level, as measured in this study, does not have any statistically discernible effects on either of our political participation indexes.

of collectively cultivated aspiration to influence society.¹⁵ In an effort to track this kind of emotional engagement on the organisational level, we asked the respondents to assess the importance of political activity in Sweden, as reflected in the mission of their respective associations. We regard associations scoring high on ‘political mission’ as more motivated to act politically, in that they consider attempts to influence policy-making processes, and the implementation of political decisions, to be significant tasks.

We would certainly not be surprised if associations that find political participation important actually tend to perform more political activities than their politically dispassionate counterparts. However, in line with Verba, Scholzman and Brady’s approach (1995, pp. 343–368) the simultaneous consideration of resources and motivation is methodologically warranted. Taking political mission into account offers a test for spurious relationships in a purely resource based model. It might be that politically motivated associations, besides participating more often, tend to acquire political resources to a greater extent. Such associations may, for instance, put more efforts into the recruitment of new members, or they may be more inclined to develop a healthy internal democracy.

In addition, we also seek to evaluate the potential importance of contacts with policy-makers. Associations may receive opportunities to express their opinions if some of their members know politicians on various levels—or at least know how to establish contact with them. And, perhaps even more important, having access to elected representatives would probably increase the likelihood of requests for political activity. Associations may be encouraged to take part in campaigns and manifestations if they are familiar to politicians who promote, or even organise, such activities; hence, they may also be politically recruited that way. We tried to measure the range of the ‘political network’ of each association through a detailed series of questions on contacts, both with elected representatives and with political parties on the national, regional and local level.¹⁶

¹⁵ In the words of Verba, Scholzman and Brady it should be important to consider the actual desire to participate because, after all ‘[p]olitical activity is [...] *voluntary* activity’ (1995, p. 343, italics in original).

¹⁶ As a supplement to the measure of political networks, we also constructed a corresponding variable for contacts with public authorities. The effects of the resulting ‘bureaucracy network’ variable on political participation proved to be very similar to the effects of political network. However, when these variables were simultaneously entered in the more complex regression models (see table 5) we did not find any evidence of independent direct effects of contacts with public authorities. In addition, the survey included a direct measure of actual invitations to political activity on the collective level. The associations were asked if they (during the last two-year period) ‘have been called to participate in decision-making processes’ (either on a permanent, or an occasional basis) in any neighbourhood, municipal or national councils or committees. 25 of our 106 associations reported having been recruited in this way. Examining potential influences of such experiences on political participation rates, though, does not accumulate further explanatory power. Also in this case, controlling for political network, density we do not find any significant effects of explicit political

Table 5. Predicting associational level political participation by resources, motivation and recruitment networks

Independent variables	Proclaiming activities				Protesting activities			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Resources								
Size of association	.18***	.06	.12*	.06	.12**	.05	.09*	.05
Information technology	.23***	.08	.17**	.07	-.03	.06	-.07	.06
Internal democracy	1.09***	.26	.74***	.25	.62***	.21	.41**	.20
Motivation								
Political mission	.16***	.03	.09***	.04	.09***	.03	.04	.03
Recruitment								
Political network			.07***	.02			.04***	.01
(Constant)	-1.25	.39	-.72	.38	-.78	.30	-.45	.30
<i>N</i> = 101	Adj. <i>R</i> ² .38		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .49		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .15		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .23	

Statistical significance: *** $p < .01$ ** $p < .05$ * $p < .10$

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients (*B*), and standard errors (*SE B*). For details concerning the dependent variables (proclaiming and protesting) and the resource variables, see note to Table 4. *Political mission* is measured through a question on how each association assess the importance of trying to build opinion and make its views known to politicians and public authorities; the variable values correspond to a 5-point response option scale ranging from 1 ('highly unimportant') to 5 ('highly important'). *Political network* is based on a series of questions on whether the association has had contacts either with elected representatives in the national parliament, in a municipal council, or in a neighbourhood council; or with political parties operating at the national, regional or local level. All contacts of these kinds were summed into an index, theoretically ranging from 0 to 24 (the maximum figure would represent contacts with all eight larger political parties at all three different levels).

Expanding on our modified resource model by way of these measures, we obtain the results displayed in table 5.¹⁷ For each of the political participation indexes, we have again estimated two models; first adding political mission, and then also political network, to the resource variables.

Studying signs as well as standard errors of the regression coefficients in table 5, we find that our empirical evaluation provides support for the impact of all three CVM factors on the associational level. All resource factors that proved to be significant in the earlier and more restricted models still have statistically significant effects. Thus, the analyses imply that the participatory consequences of the resources we have highlighted are not due to differences between the associations in the willingness to act politically. This notwithstanding, we may conclude that political motivation and access to potentially recruiting networks clearly are important factors too. The coefficients representing the effects of political mission and political network are all positive, and in all but one

encouragement. Still, one should bear in mind that the invitations in question, besides being relatively few, did not concern the modes of political participation constituting the dependent variables of this study.

¹⁷ In comparison with the (full) original resource model, we have now left out the variables for which no direct effects on the political participation indexes could be traced; i.e. 'space for activities' and 'Swedish skills'.

case highly statistically significant as well. We note that the inclusion of political network, in model 2 and model 4 respectively, results in a substantial reduction of the effects of political mission. Still, for proclaiming activities both variables have significant positive effects after the final estimation. For protest activities, however, the coefficient for political mission is not satisfactorily robust once political networks is taken into account.¹⁸

The correct interpretation of this pattern is not readily established, since no firm conclusions may be drawn on causality. It might be that the politically motivated associations to a higher extent establish contacts with politicians. If this is the case, the effect of political mission, at least partly, runs through political network. The politically interested, and assumingly efficacious, associations thus tend to obtain even more inspiration and encouragement through their political initiatives. Equally conceivable though is the possibility that contacts rather are set off by politicians, perhaps later on being administered via the offices of political parties. Consequently, the positive influence of political mission may to some extent be exaggerated without control for differences in the prospects of being targets of contacts from political elites.

Concluding discussion

Applying a theoretical model developed to explain individual level political participation on the organisational level, several interesting patterns emerged in this study. We have found evidence of systematic and noteworthy differences between ethnic associations when it comes to their propensity to take part in political life in Sweden. Not surprisingly, our findings suggest that associations viewing attempts to political influence as an important part of their mission tend to be more politically active. However, the actual possibilities to raise the political voice of the organisation are also affected by fairly basic resources. The very size of the association matters in this respect, as well as its possibilities to coordinate and distribute information effectively.

In addition to the internal development of political motivation, we also found that encouragement may be provided through external networks. Our analyses suggest that associations having more frequent contacts with elected representatives and political parties are more likely to be invited to take part in political activities.

¹⁸ It might be that our measure of the density of political networks to some extent also captures actual political participation (as for instance, if contacts are made during some political activity). On the other hand, compared with the original version of the CVM, the 'distance' between the independent and dependent variable is arguably greater in this study. After all, it is not particularly surprising that people receiving explicit requests for political participation tend to participate more often. However, we find it less reasonable that a given association's contacts with politicians solely reflect that it has taken part in the same (proclaiming and protesting) activities as its political acquaintances.

Moreover, our results suggest that organisational level civic skills are enhanced in associations that have developed an internal culture characterised by participative democratic ideals. Widespread possibilities for members to influence their own associations thus appear to promote the political influence of the collective as well. At the same time, however, our analytical approach helped us illuminate an interesting example of contradictory tendencies in the accumulation of political resource capital. All else being equal, large associations tend to have better possibilities to organise and perform political activities. Still, the ‘demos problem’ of classical debates on the problems of democracy apparently apply to voluntary associations as well. The larger the association, the more difficult it becomes to involve each member in collective decision-making procedures, whereby they face a risk of diminishing the participative spirit that appears to be important for the political resource pool of the association. Thus, in order to gain political influence and ultimately improve societal conditions for their members, one may advise ethnic associations to opt for both quantity and quality.

Contrary to reasonable expectations, members’ skills in the Swedish language do not seem to have an effect on associational level political participation. We could not find any differences in this respect between associations in which all activities are conducted in the language of the respective ethnic group, and associations in which Swedish is continuously practiced. As noted, communicative skills in the lingua franca of one’s society may be more crucial for an individual than for the member collective of an ethnic association. In the latter case, the individual resource deficit may be compensated if only a few active members are linguistically competent enough to guide the other, once this is required. Another complementary interpretation could be that the political participation of ethnic associations in Sweden rarely depends on Swedish skills. Political acts such as demonstrations and newsletter distribution might indeed be conducted in a foreign language, particularly if the message is addressed to an external political regime. Sorting out the relative importance of (different) language skills therefore seems to be a promising route for future research.

It also remains to explore the background characteristics of the voluntary associations that are privileged in terms of resources, motivation and networks. As noted, organisational membership is often a powerful predictor of differences in individual level political participation. A question that seems warranted in the light of this study, is if something similar is conceivable on the collective level as well. In fact, analogous to individuals’ possibilities, associations may also seek additional strength ‘collectively’ by joining federations and other umbrella organisations. As a platform for mutual interests, such meta-associations are perhaps able to reduce information costs and provide supportive structures in a way that may particularly benefit ethnic associations. Hence, it should also be fruitful to investigate the extent to which a membership of an umbrella organisation has the same positive effects on endowments and ambitions for political participation, as a membership in a voluntary associations has on the individual level.

Conceptually and methodologically our analysis demonstrates how the CVM can be fruitfully applied on the organisational level. Using the general logic of this individual level explanatory model, we have proposed collective level equivalents of resources, motivation and political recruitment networks. With suitable empirical measures, we were also able to reproduce supportive mechanisms in line with more conventional tests of the original model. As a side-effect, our analyses have provided new insights into the conditions of ethnic associations' political activity. Since the empirical study is limited to a single country and to a particular type of organisation, we encourage contextually modified replication efforts, through which the fruitfulness of our approach could be further evaluated in other institutional settings.

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