

A Cross-National Comparison  
of the Effect of Work-Related Factors  
on Membership in Voluntary Associations

**Sarah Busse Spencer**

Department of Sociology, Higher School of Economics, Moscow

sspencer@hse.ru

**Anna Almakaeva**

Laboratory for Comparative Social Research, Higher School of Economics, Moscow

aalmakaeva@hse.ru

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Social capital has been defined and measured many ways (Castle 2002), both in the U.S. and around the world. Networks, norms and trust are among the most common terms used to define social capital (Cook 2005), but measurement ranges from membership in voluntary associations (Putnam 2000) to social networks which facilitate finding employment (Fernandez, Castilla, and Moore 2000). In theory, social capital can have “spillover” effects (Aarstad, Haugland, and Greve 2010), where social capital in one sphere can increase participation or efficiency in another. However, while the effect of volunteer work on employment has been examined (Wilson and Musick 2003), only limited attention has been paid to the effect of workplace social capital on membership in voluntary associations (Wilson and Musick 1997), and only so far for the US. How does employment and work status affect membership in voluntary associations in countries around the world?

### **Explaining Membership in Voluntary Associations**

Factors influencing membership in voluntary associations may be national or individual level variables. National-level factors explaining participation in voluntary associations across countries can include such factors as: the climate for voluntary associations (Teorell, Charron, Dahlberg, Holmberg, Rothstein, Sundin, and Svensson 2013); a nation’s democratic legacy (Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993); “statist vs nonstatist” society types (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas 2001); the presence of strong and visible voluntary organizations which facilitates individual participation in them (Wollebaek and Stromsnes 2008); or specific religious traditions which could encourage voluntary association participation (Lam 2006; Loveland, Jones-Stater, and Park 2008).

Individual level factors affecting volunteer membership can be divided into structural and cognitive elements, much like the broader concept of social capital (Young 2014). Individual structural variables include demographics, networks, and place of residence. Previous research has characterized those more likely to join volunteer organizations as: those who have higher education (Wilson 2000); those with “privilege” (higher social class, higher status, greater financial resources)

(Miller 2010), those who work in the public sector (Wilson and Musick 1997), those with paid employment in the non-profit sector (Rotolo and Wilson 2006), or those with stable careers (Rotolo and Wilson 2003). While some research suggests no membership difference in rural or urban areas Belgium (Hooghe and Botterman 2012), other researchers have indicated that over-income citizens, particularly those living in poor neighborhoods, are less likely to belong to voluntary associations (Duncan 2010). Research among African-Americans has suggested that education is crucial for membership in voluntary associations but that occupation must also be considered (Woodard 1988).

Individual cognitive or cultural variables include trust, motivations and values and attitudes. Generalized trust, or the attitude that “in general, others can be trusted”, has been positively associated with voluntary association membership (Geys 2012). Personal motivations and experience while volunteering play a central role in enduring involvement in voluntary associations (Lu and Schuett 2014). Various dimensions of personal religiosity can also play a role in voluntary association membership (Lam 2002).

### **Links Between Work and Social Capital**

Countless studies link social capital with work and employment, but most studies examine how individuals use social capital to find work (Baker 2000) or employers hire individuals to positions (Fernandez and Castilla 2001). Individuals prosper in their jobs by using the social capital of social networks to broker across structural holes (Burt 2005). Few articles beyond Wilson and Musick (1997) have mentioned the reverse connection—the impact of employment on the type of social capital measured by membership in voluntary organizations. This article contributes to understanding the social impact of work on participation in voluntary associations by examining three factors related to work, as described in the following section: 1) employment (full-time, part-time or self-employment) vs unemployment; 2) whether a person is a supervisor at work and 3) the level of autonomy, creativity and non-manual tasks at work.

### **Possible Work Effects on Participation in Voluntary Associations**

*Does Being Employed Matter?*

A long stream of research has demonstrated positive social benefits of employment beyond financial remuneration; including health, sense of well-being, happiness, and higher life satisfaction (Bockerman and Ilmakunnas 2006; Olsen and Dahl 2007; Stavrova, Schlosser, and Fetchenhauer 2011). Recent cross-national research in Europe suggested that the labor force participation of working class respondents has a greater impact on their informal social capital (personal social networks) than that of upper class respondents (Pichler and Wallace 2009:330: 330 ). Employment status and workplace organization also affect the size and shape of respondents' social networks and social capital (Oksanen, Kawachi, Kouvonen, Takao, Suzuki, Virtanen, Pentti, Kivimäki, and Vahtera 2013). Research in Holland has suggested that voluntarism encourages the creation of weak ties which improves results of subsequent job searching (Ruiter and Graaf 2009). Employment and the type of occupation also matters for membership in voluntary associations: elites across professions are most likely to volunteer, but many white-collar occupations more prone to volunteer than blue-collar, independent of education and hours worked (Wilson and Musick 1997).

*Are Bosses Joiners? Effects of Supervisory Status*

In contrast to employment, the question of social status has been previously studied in regard to membership in voluntary associations. From the 1950s to the present, research has argued that members of elite groups or upper social classes are more likely to join or be more active in civic associations (Dahl 1961; Lazerwitz 1962; Mills 1956; Olsen 1973). More recent research has also echoed this stratification of membership: privileged Americans are more likely to join voluntary organizations, but also more likely to gain benefits from their membership than are those from lower social classes (Miller 2010; Pichler and Wallace 2009). Higher human capital (education) has a positive effect on volunteering, but social class and occupational socialization also matter for participation (Egerton 2002). Education and higher social class (occupational status and income) positively influence both engagement in volunteer activities and the hours spent volunteering

(Wilson and Musick 1998). Economic inequality negatively impacts civic participation (Lim and Sander 2013: 14), much as inequality also detracts from the positive effects of voluntary associations in society (Park and Subramanian 2012).

Recent cross-national research compared formal social capital (membership in organizations) and informal social capital (personal networks) across social classes in Europe using the Eurobarometer (Pichler and Wallace 2009). Pichler and Wallace find that “higher social classes, including people in professional or managerial jobs are more embedded in a broader range of networks through their activities in formal associations” and on average belong to more organizations on average (330). However, whether participation is due to objective markers of social class (education or income) or identification with a subjective social class, or whether there is also a separate influence specifically of status in the workplace has not been sufficiently examined.

#### *Does the Type of Work Matter?*

Wilson and Musick argue that the type of work matters: those with “self-directed” work (autonomous) develop skills that can be useful in voluntary organizations (leading a meeting, organizing a project) (1997: 255). In this research, we examine supervisory status but also the extent to which the work is self-directed, nonmanual, or creative.

First, supervisors will report having fewer manual tasks, but many non-supervisors also could report occupations of greater intellectual content than manual work (for example, professors). Some occupations with greater cognitive dimensions are considered higher status, so examining both status and type of task will allow us to investigate whether the supervisory status or the intellectual nature of the work is more important for participation in voluntary associations.

Second, autonomy is often rated highly in employee satisfaction surveys, and certain occupations are more desirable because of their perceived greater autonomy (Roelen, Koopmans, and Groothoff 2008). Occupational autonomy (or the lack of it) plays a role also in family dynamics (Stets 1995), and also “spills over” to voluntary associations to if it thus spills over to home life,

perhaps it might also have an effect on participation in voluntary associations. Some research suggests that some volunteers value autonomy in their voluntary affiliations (Barnes and Sharpe 2009).

Third, occupations high in creativity are associated with the “creative class,” an idea first fostered by Florida as a possible both description of and prescription for urban and regional economic development (Florida 2003). Correlations were noted between creative occupations and higher tolerance for gays, bohemians and overall tolerance, which in turn were associated with higher regional wages (Florida, Mellander, and Stolarick 2010). Although the original thesis has been debated and revised, there is still some association observed between the creative class and higher social capital (Westlund and Calidoni 2010). It is important to distinguish whether there is a status effect or a creativity effect shaping which respondents are more likely to participate in voluntary associations.

### Country Effects

Most research on associational membership focuses on a single or at most a few countries. This analysis extends Wilson and Musick’s (1997) original study to a wide range of countries, which may have very different conditions for voluntary associations. To account for country-level effects in comparing the effect of employment, the current study incorporates a multilevel approach which considers national level conditions for voluntary associations, following the lead of previous research using hierarchical linear modeling (Hamamura 2012; Park and Subramanian 2012; Robbins 2011). Hamamura (2012) demonstrated that social class encourages generalized trust only in wealthy countries. Park and Subramanian (2012) found an intermediary effect of national level economic inequality that strengthens the connection between generalized trust and membership in voluntary associations. Robbins (2011) revealed a similar impact from institutions and laws which protect property rights. This article follows a similar logic in examining the link between work-

related factors and membership in voluntary associations across countries against the backdrop of the level of development of civic institutions.

To summarize, we test the following hypotheses across nations:

1. Respondents engaged in the labor force will have higher participation rates than those not engaged in the labor force.
2. Among employed respondents, supervisors will have higher participation rates than non-supervisors.
3. Among employed respondents, those with higher creativity, autonomy or intellectual tasks at work will have higher participation rates than those with less creative, autonomous or intellectual work.
4. In countries with well-developed civic institutions the impact of work-related factors on participation in voluntary associations will be greater.

#### Data and Methods

To examine membership in voluntary organizations combining education, social class, and work-related variables including employment status, supervisory status and work conditions across multiple countries from all parts of the world, we use the World Values Survey (WVS), 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> waves. Survey data collected between 2005-2009 (Wave 5) and 2010-2014 (Wave 6) (World Values Survey 2014a; World Values Survey 2014b) were combined to create a dataset with 74 countries.

*Dependent Variable: Participation.* Our dependent variable includes participation in 6 organizations: 1) sport and recreational organizations, 2) art, music or educational organizations, 3) labor unions, 4) professional organizations, 5) humanitarian or charitable organizations, and 6) environmental organizations. In order to account for the level of involvement we created two measures – an “index of overall membership” and an “index of active membership.” While the index of “overall membership” reflects the mean number of organizations per person counting either

active or inactive participation, the index of “active membership” reflects a mean score of only active participation.

*Independent variables: Work-Related Factors.* First, “employment status” relies on the the question “Are you employed now or not? If so, how many hours?” In the analysis it is treated as a set of dummy variables: 1) full time employee (30 hours a week or more); 2) part time employee (less than 30 hours a week); 3) self employed; 4) retired/pensioned; 5) housewife; 6) student; 7) unemployed. Second, supervisory status is measured using the WVS question “Are you a supervisor at work?,” which is answered yes or no and recoded into binary variable where “yes” is 1 and “no” is 0.

Third, the three work characteristics used are measured with the following questions. Intellectual work is measured by the 10-point question “Are the tasks you do at work mostly manual or mostly intellectual?” Creative work is measured through the 10-point question “Are the tasks you perform at work mostly routine tasks or mostly creative tasks?”. The level of autonomy at work is reflected by the 10-point question “How much independence do you have in performing your tasks at work?”

*Control variables: Individual-level and Country-level.* Individual level control variables include age, gender, educational attainment, relative position in a 10-point income scale, and respondent’s self-assessment of his/her social class position. At the country level, as a proxy for the development of civic institutions in a country, data are drawn from measures of Associational and Organizational Rights provided by Freedom House. This is a 12-point index reflecting three important aspects of civic society: 1) freedom of assembly, demonstration and open public discussion; 2) freedom for nongovernmental organizations; 3) freedom for labor unions, peasant organizations, professional and other organizations as well as effective collective bargaining (Freedom House 2014). Statistics on associational freedom were taken from the Quality of Government dataset (Teorell et al. 2013).

*Methods.* The central method of this paper is hierarchical linear (multilevel) modeling with cross-level interactions and random effects. In the regression with interaction effects all independent variables are functions of the moderator (in this case associational freedom in a country). Therefore standard errors for slope coefficients are dependent on the values of the moderator (Brambor, Clark, and Golder 2006; Jaccard and Turissi 2003). Since we are interested in the moderating effect of civic institutions, we report coefficients for two types of countries: countries with the lowest value of associational freedom and countries with the highest value of associational freedom.

## **Results**

The analysis is presented in two stages. The first stage tests the hypothesis on the impact of unemployment on associational membership and uses the full dataset of the 74 countries in the WVS (Table 1). The second stage tests the impact of work-related factors and includes only those respondents across these 74 countries who are engaged in the labor force (Table 2).

Table 1 demonstrates that, compared to employed respondents (baseline), respondents who are not in the labor force (unemployed, retired or housewife), have lower rates of overall memberships (left two columns) and active memberships (right two columns). The fact that employment matters for membership confirms Hypothesis 1. It is worth mentioning that while education, income scale and subjective social class all remain statistically significant in these models, they do not eliminate the effect of employment status, confirming our suspicion that not only social status but also the actual fact of employment plays a role in participation in voluntary associations.

To test supervisory status and occupational characteristics we selected only respondents who are currently employed. Across our models, supervisory status remains statistically significant, even when accounting for education, income and social class, thus confirming Hypothesis 2. Education and social class remain statistically significant, but income is not statistically significant once supervisory status is accounted for. Creativity or non-routine tasks at work has a statistically

significant effect on membership in voluntary associations. However, intellectual work and autonomy adds nothing to participation. Thus for Hypothesis 3, we can confirm only that respondents with creative occupations have higher membership rates.

For the multilevel analysis, we assumed that the impact of work-related factors would be greater in those countries where the civic climate is more favorable. As a proxy for such a climate the index of Associational and organizational rights provided by Freedom House Project were included in the model. Evidence from multilevel regression modeling demonstrates that this suggestion is confirmed only in relation to some variables (see Tables 1 and 2). The negative impact of unemployment is statistically significant only in the countries with the highest level of associational freedom, while in countries with the lowest level this relationship is not robust. Being a student is statistically significant only for active membership and only in countries where associational freedom is high. Creative work and supervisory status lead both to greater overall membership and to greater active membership in all types of societies (Table 1). Part-time employment compared to full-time employment increases participation only in countries with the lowest level of associational freedom (Table 2). However, this result is robust only for overall membership, not active membership.

### Conclusion

This paper has examined the effect of work-related factors on participation in voluntary associations. On the whole, our data confirm that employment matters for membership in non-profit organizations. Supervisory status positively affects rates of membership in voluntary associations. Having “creative” work has positive effect on participation, while autonomy and cognitive work are not significant. These results are in line with previous research which had suggested that high status work positively supported volunteerism in the US (Wilson and Musick 1997). Most importantly, multilevel regression illustrates that employment remains a significant factor in membership rates even when controlling for income, education, social class, and country-level civic climate. Across

countries, employment matters for explaining membership in voluntary associations, and more research must include work in understanding civic engagement.

**Table 1. Multilevel regression models for all types of employment**

	Dependent variable: overall membership		Dependent variable: active membership	
	Estimation for countries with lowest level of associational freedom	Estimation for countries with highest level of associational freedom	Estimation for countries with lowest level of associational freedom	Estimation for countries with highest level of associational freedom
Intercept	0.078(0.030)**	0.086(0.020)***	0.029(0.014)*	0.022(0.009)*
<b>Country-level</b>				
Associational freedom	0.008(0.042)	0.008(0.042)	-0.007(0.019)	-0.007(0.019)
<b>Individual level</b>				
Employed (base)				
Unemployed	-0.020(0.011)†	-0.038(0.008)***	-0.005(0.008)	-0.021(0.005)***
Retired	-0.031(0.012)**	-0.042(0.007)***	-0.016(0.006)**	-0.020(0.003)***
Housewife	-0.033(0.0103)***	-0.049(0.007)***	-0.017(0.006)***	-0.025(0.004)***
Students	-0.003(0.011)	-0.002(0.008)	0.001(0.007)	0.012(0.005)*
Age	0.015(0.014)	0.015(0.014)	0.005(0.008)	0.005(0.008)
Male	0.008(0.003)*	0.008(0.003)*	0.006(0.002)***	0.006(0.002)***
Education	0.083(0.008)***	0.083(0.008)***	0.051(0.006)***	0.051(0.006)***
Income in deciles	0.033(0.011)***	0.033(0.011)***	0.016(0.006)**	0.016(0.006)**
Subjective social class	0.061(0.007)***	0.061(0.007)***	0.037(0.004)***	0.037(0.004)***
<b>Cross-level interactions with associational freedom</b>				
xUnemployed	-0.019(0.016)	-0.019(0.016)	-0.170(0.011)	-0.170(0.011)
xRetired	-0.011(0.016)	-0.011(0.016)	-0.004(0.007)	-0.004(0.007)
xHousewife	-0.016(0.015)	-0.016(0.015)	-0.009(0.008)	-0.009(0.008)
xStudents	0.001(0.016)	0.001(0.016)	0.012(0.010)	0.012(0.010)
Number of countries	74	74	74	74
Number of respondents	91393	91393	91393	91393

Significance Levels: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.5, †p<0.1 standard errors in parenthesis

**Table 2. Multilevel regression models for Occupational Characteristics**  
(Selecting for Full-time, part-time or self-employed respondents)

	Dependent variable: overall membership		Dependent variable: active membership	
	Estimation for countries with lowest level of associational freedom	Estimation for countries with highest level of associational freedom	Estimation for countries with lowest level of associational freedom	Estimation for countries with highest level of associational freedom
Intercept	0.045(0.032)	0.087(0.021)***	0.011(0.014)	0.014(0.009)
<b>Country-level</b>				
Associational freedom	0.042(0.045)	0.042(0.045)	0.002(0.019)	0.002(0.019)
<b>Individual level</b>				
Full-time (base)				
Part-time	0.028(0.011)*	0.003(0.008)	0.010(0.006) †	0.004(0.004)
Self-employed	-0.013(0.012)	-0.010(0.008)	0.006(0.007)	-0.003(0.005)
Supervision	0.027(0.008)***	0.031(0.005)***	0.018(0.005)***	0.024(0.004)***
Manual vs. cognitive	0.011(0.0145)	0.015(0.009)†	0.006(0.010)	0.007(0.006)
Routine vs. creative	0.054(0.015)***	0.051(0.010)***	0.018(0.010) †	0.030(0.006)***
Depend vs. independent.	-0.011(0.014)	-0.007(0.010)	0.007(0.010)	0.006(0.006)
Age	0.011(0.016)	0.011(0.016)	0.002(0.008)	0.002(0.008)
Male	0.004(0.004)	0.004(0.004)	0.005(0.002)*	0.005(0.002)*
Education	0.075(0.008)***	0.075(0.008)***	0.050(0.002)***	0.050(0.002)***
Income in deciles	0.017(0.012)	0.017(0.012)	0.004(0.007)	0.004(0.007)
Subjective social class	0.048(0.009)***	0.048(0.009)***	0.031(0.005)***	0.031(0.005)***
<b>Cross-level interactions with associational freedom</b>				
xPart-time	-0.250(0.016)	-0.250(0.016)	-0.006(0.008)	-0.006(0.008)
xSelf-employed	0.003(0.016)	0.003(0.016)	0.017(0.010) †	0.017(0.010) †
xSupervision	0.004(0.012)	0.004(0.012)	0.006(0.008)	0.006(0.008)
xManual vs. cognitive	0.004(0.020)	0.004(0.020)	0.001(0.014)	0.001(0.014)
xRoutine vs. creative	-0.003(0.021)	-0.003(0.021)	0.012(0.013)	0.012(0.013)
xDepend vs. indep.	0.004(0.020)	0.004(0.020)	-0.001(0.014)	-0.001(0.014)
Countries N	74	74	74	74
Respondents N	49691	49691	49691	49691

Significance Levels: \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.5, †p<0.1 standard errors in parenthesis

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