

# VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS

List names of all organizations in past year to which you:

1. Paid annual membership dues
2. Volunteered an hour or more of your time
3. Donated money or other goods (clothes, food, blood)
4. Participated in member and/or committee meetings
5. Served as an elected or appointed officer
6. Contacted government or business officials on its behalf

Which orgs are member-service or community-service?  
Is your motive for participation altruistic or do you also gain some personal benefits? Are you involved to build community, advance a social cause, have a good time?

# Modernization in Classical Sociology

The classical theorists of industrialization and modernization (Tönnies, Durkheim, Simmel) all viewed 19<sup>th</sup> c. urban immigrants as suffering from debilitating losses of community and intimacy compared to rural villagers.



In “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), Georg Simmel argued that the modern city’s intense “nervous stimulation” produces a **self** that is rational, unemotional, blasé, alienated & autonomous. (“*Stadtluft macht frei [und] krank*” – *City air makes you free .. and sick*).

Lacking traditional society’s constraints, urban dwellers form **calculative & indifferent social relations**, with their individualism reaping negative outcomes, such as loneliness and mental illness.

Emile Durkheim proposed **corporative organizations**, based on occupations & professions, to **regulate** society for the general good:

“...when individuals who are found to have common interests associate, it is not only to defend those interests, it is to associate, that is, not to feel lost among adversaries, to have the pleasure of communing, to make one out of many, which is to say, finally, to lead the same moral life together.”

**Durkheim. 1933. *The Division of Labor in Society***



# Associations & *Democracy in America*

Alexis de Tocqueville's classic study *Democracy in America*, based on his 1830s tour, identified one structural basis of the U.S. "exceptionalism" in its unique voluntary associations:



“Americans of all ages, all stations in life, and all types of disposition are forever forming associations. There are not only commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but others of a thousand different types – religious, moral, serious, futile, very general and very limited, immensely large and very minute. . . . Nothing, in my view, deserves more attention than the intellectual and moral associations in America.”

de Tocqueville. 1835-40. *Democracy in America*

19<sup>th</sup> century liberalism's conundrum was how to minimize democratic government's intrusion into domestic affairs of the populace (during transition from *Gemeinschaft* ⇒ *Gesellschaft*)

Which social structures could best preserve individual freedoms & group liberties by limiting state & market power concentration?

# America the Exceptional?

Was Tocqueville's analysis of democracy based on a unique society whose features can't be transferred to other nations?



- National culture of individualism and competitiveness
- Laissez-faire economics – minimal state intervention
- Religious & ethnic pluralism and tolerance
- Administrative decentralization (federalism)
- Free press and strong legal profession
- Fluid class & social status, high social mobility
- Conformity to a mass popular culture



Totalitarian regimes, like Nazi Germany & USSR, seek to destroy or co-opt independent associations. How/can American-style democracy be exported to mixed-ethnic nations that lack any tradition of ethnically diversified voluntary associations?

Recent examples: Bosnia, Kosovo, Iraq, ...

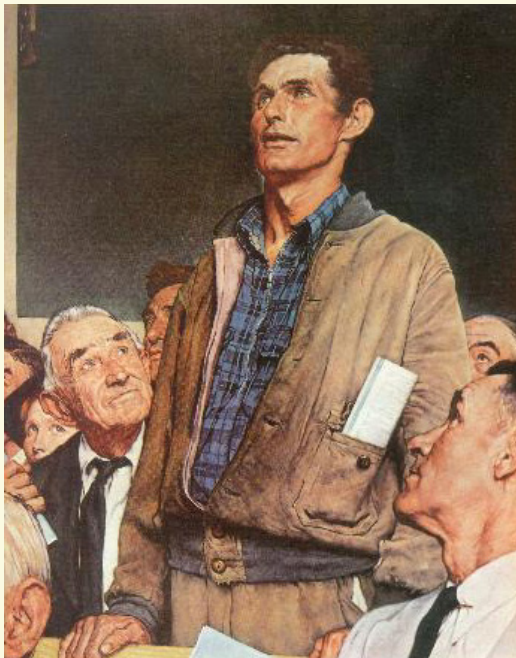


# Tyranny of the Majority

**PROBLEM:** In mass democracy, public opinion has potential to threaten a **tyranny of the majority** (“totalitarian democracy”):

- Democratic rule suppresses minority groups’ interests
- Pressures on public officials for state action to enforce equality

Mediocrity of democratic mass culture produces conformity & a stifling uniformity of social life – a leveling-down to common standards & tastes



**SOLUTION:** Create many voluntary & civic associations able to resist domination of the citizenry by its own democratic state

Especially in pluralistic, heterogeneous societies, VAs are indispensable for mediating state-civil society relations

In exercising grassroots democracy, VAs are training schools for citizenship values, norms, and practices of larger society

# Two Important Association Functions

## **FOSTERING PERSONAL AUTONOMY:**

- ✓ Express interests, needs, problems of diverse population
- ✓ Instill local community's moral standards
- ✓ Reduce frustration, powerlessness, anomie (normlessness)
- ✓ Develop sense of participation, involvement, satisfy personal needs without necessity of state intervention

## **PROMOTING CIVIC ENGAGEMENT:**

- ✓ Educative role in civic affairs and democratic practices
- ✓ Create power centers autonomous from state, avoiding oppression
- ✓ Channels for two-way communication between ordinary citizens & political elites

# What is a Voluntary Association?

**Voluntary association:** Named organization that seeks nonmarket solutions to individual or group problems



- Formal criteria for membership on a voluntary basis; relies heavily on unpaid participants
- May employ staff under authority of assn. leaders
- Often have formal democratic procedures to involve members in electing leaders, amending by-laws

Many VAs are also legally nonprofit orgs:

- Board of directors responsible for its policies
- Not operated to generate “profit” for redistribution to shareholders
- Net revenues must be reinvested in the org
- Internal Revenue Service tax-exempt status



# U.S. Association Demography

David Horton Smith distinguished two types of voluntary orgs

(1) Voluntary associations with paid staffs

(2) Grassroots: local, voluntary, autonomous, “voluntary altruism based”

Smith's estimate of U.S. association population in 1990s:

- Over 90% of orgs are missed by IRS financial records
- Paid-staff voluntary assn population = 2 million orgs
- Grassroots assn population = 7.5 million orgs
- Average volunteer gave 2.6 hours/week = 135 hours/year
- Volunteers gave total of 27.6 billion hours, equal to 16.2 million full-time workers [~13% of U.S. labor force]
- Churches received 39% of volunteers' efforts



# Still the Nation of Joiners?

Since 1974, the General Social Survey has asked about 16 general types of membership groups. In the 2004 GSS:

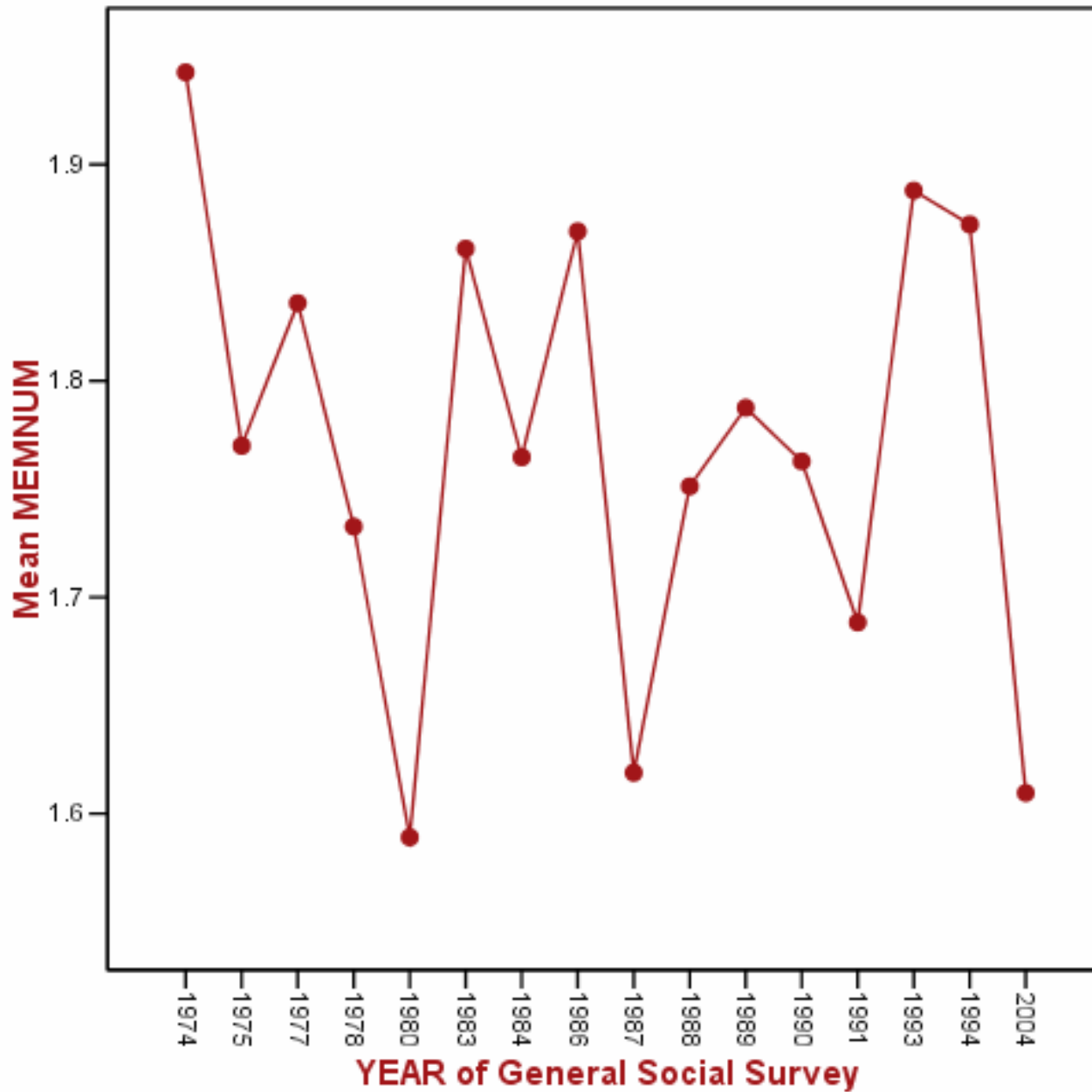
38% belonged to no associations  
23% belonged to only one type of group  
16% belonged to 4 or more types  
Mean = 1.61 Standard deviation = 1.8

U.S. rate is highest among 15 industrial nations; but if churches & unions are removed, then Canada, Great Britain, N. Ireland have equally high levels.

Curtis, Grabb & Baer. 1992 "Voluntary Association Membership in Fifteen Countries: A Comparative Analysis." *American Sociological Review* 57:139-152.

TYPE	%
CHURCH GROUP	31
SPORTS	17
PROFESSIONAL	15
SCHOOL SERVING	14
LITERARY, ARTS	11
HOBBY	11
UNION	10
SERVICE	10
YOUTH	10
FRATERNAL	7
VETERANS	5
SCHOOL FRAT.	4
POLITICAL	2
NATIONALITY	3
FARM	3
ANY OTHERS?	7

# U.S. Membership Trend, 1974-2004



# Differences among Nations

What factors explain cross-national differences in percent of adult European volunteers –12% in Slovakia vs. 38% in Netherlands?

TABLE 1  
VOLUNTEERS AS PERCENTAGE OF ADULT POPULATION  
IN EUROPE, BY SEX, 1995

Country	Percent of Male Population Reported Volunteering	Percent of Female Population Reported Volunteering	Percent of Total Population Reported Volunteering
Belgium	27	35	32
Bulgaria	21	18	19
Denmark	29	27	28
Germany	18	17	18
Great Britain	31	36	34
Ireland	28	24	25
Netherlands	43	34	38
Slovakia	12	12	12
Sweden	38	32	36
Total	27	26	27

Source: based on information reported in KATHERINE GASKIN & JUSTIN DAVID SMITH, A NEW CIVIL EUROPE? A STUDY OF THE EXTENT AND ROLE OF VOLUNTEERING 28-29 (1997).

# Cross-National Volunteering



Helmut Anheier & Lester Salamon (1999) proposed a **social origins model**. They identified four regime types by crossing two dimensions:  
(1) extent of government social welfare spending  
(2) economic scale of the nonprofit sector

TABLE 4  
NONPROFIT SECTOR REGIME TYPES

Government social spending	Economic Nonprofit Sector Size	
	<i>Low</i>	<i>High</i>
<i>Low</i>	Statist (Japan)	Liberal (United States and United Kingdom)
<i>High</i>	Social democratic (Sweden and Finland)	Corporatist (Germany and France)

**TABLE 5**  
**NONPROFIT SECTOR SCALE AND VOLUNTEERING**

Nonprofit sector type		Size of Paid Labor	Volunteer Input
<i>Liberal</i>	<b>US &amp; UK</b>	High	high
<i>Corporatist</i>	<b>Germany</b>	High	low
<i>Social Democratic</i>	<b>Sweden</b>	Low	high
<i>Statist</i>	<b>Japan</b>	Low	low



Does the balance of political power between the middle- and working-classes account for the U.S.'s low welfare spending and large voluntary sector, but the opposite pattern in Scandinavian countries? Is voluntary action in other nations also explained by unique national cultures and historical institutions?



# Taking a Free Ride

Mancur Olson (1965) *Logic of Collective Action* identified “free rider” problems that limit or prevent the creation of VAs, recruiting new members, contributing resources (time & \$\$\$), pursuing org'l goals.

People will act only for their self-interests (utility maximizing action)



- Rational decision is to give only as much as one benefits
- Temptation to “free ride” on others’ efforts by withholding contributions while someone else does all the work (“Let George do it”)
- But if all behave rationally, little or nothing gets done
- Free riding difficult to prevent in VAs seeking “public goods” – if the goal is achieved, no one can be excluded from receiving the benefit

Neighborhood Crime Watch creates security for all residents  
Clean Air & Water Assn lobbies to improve environment

- Hence, many VAs provide **selective incentives** – private goods that members can obtain only by joining and participating

# Incentive Systems

Different types of associations tailor particular combinations of public goods & selective incentives that are consistent with their members' interests and the org's goals

Which kinds of benefits best induce potential members to join and contribute their resources to a particular VA?

## Three basic types of incentives

**Utilitarian incentives:** Private goods in form of direct services to members that are consumed on an individual basis

**Social incentives:** Jointly coordinated social & recreational activities whose enjoyment is restricted to the membership

**Normative incentives:** Primarily public goods requiring collective efforts to influence governmental policy makers

# Incentives for Volunteers

Groups of 3-4 people design an incentive system for one of the associations below, combining both public-good and selective incentives that seem most likely to attract the target members and induce them to join and contribute time & \$\$\$.

- Identify your VA's target membership and their interests
- Develop 4-6 specific incentives & state why each one would be effective in overcoming the "free rider" temptation

- A. North American Butterfly Collectors Club**
- B. Lawyers to Ban the Death Penalty**
- C. Christian Overseas Missionary Society**
- D. Ostrich Breeders Federation**
- E. Make Foosball an Olympic Sport Now!**
- F. Family Polka Parties, International**

## *Bowling Alone*

Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) popularized a “**decline of community**” thesis: from 1960-1990, bowling by individuals went up by 10%, while participation in bowling leagues fell by 40%.



“By analogy with notions of physical capital and human capital ... **social capital** refers to features of social organisation such as networks, norms, and trust that facilitate co-ordination and co-operation for mutual benefit. Social capital enhances the benefits of investment in physical and human capital.”

Putnam cites much evidence of eroding social capital relations, implying widespread social & psychological disengagement of American citizens from participating in politics and government.

Are these the two main causes of community decline?

- More-active generation replaced by less-active
- Excessive levels of television viewing



# Community Transformed

Robert Wuthnow's (1998) **community transformed thesis**: Many new forms of civic engagement recently emerged to supplant older forms, a result of porous institutions – loose connections of work and family life.



The shift is away from long-term membership in national orgs toward short-term volunteering in local, special-purpose coalitions & networks.

Tight, life-long social bonds to civic associations are replaced by more flexible & transient welfare, service, and advocacy groups that seek to cope with entrenched social problems like poverty.

- Therapeutic & self-help small groups, like Alcoholics Anonymous, Al-Anon, Narcotics Anonymous, Gamblers Anonymous, .....
- Growth of professionalized nonprofit organizations grappling with social problems





# The Iron Law of Oligarchy

German-Italian sociologist Roberto Michels formulated an “iron law” that all organizations, no matter how democratic originally, turn into oligarchies. Leaders dominated Socialist Parties, despite mass participation ideology.



“Organization implies the tendency to oligarchy. In every organization, whether it be a political party, a professional union, or any other association of the kind, the aristocratic tendency manifests this very clearly... With the advance of organization, democracy tends to decline... It may be enunciated as a general rule that the increase in the power of the leaders is directly proportional with the extension of the organization.” **Michels. 1911. *Political Parties***

**Oligarchic tendency has several roots:**

- **Efficient bureaucracy → concentrated power**
- **Leaders possess specialized knowledge**
- **Effective control over org'l information**
- **Use political skills to protect own interests**
- **Members defer to leaders' authority, prestige**



# Organizational Dilemmas

Gun Jonsson & Ingrid Zakrisson found oligarchic tendency in interviews with the boards of directors of six small Swedish voluntary associations.



“... the assumption that there may be certain key points in an association’s life, where there are choices between an oligarchic and a democratic solution... at these key points the association is forced into a **dilemma** between the wish to be efficient, in relation to goal attainment, and the wish to be democratically efficient.”



The **dilemmas** revolve around improving organizational effectiveness by specialized leadership *versus* more responsiveness to member interests:

- Quick vs. slow goal attainment
- Dependence vs. autonomy
- Top-down vs. bottom-up reasoning
- Stability vs. change
- Control vs. chaos

How can associations solve dilemmas without resorting to oligarchy?

# Shorter Writing #1

Based on Roberto Michels' book, Jonsson & Zakrisson describe 7 crucial "steps" that lead voluntary associations to oligarchy.



Pick one of those steps and analyze it:

- Describe that dilemma and explain why it is attractive for organizational leaders
- How does it threaten org'l democracy?
- Give a brief example from a VA you know
- What choices could VAs take that might prevent them going down the oligarchic path?

**DUE in class Thursday, September 20**

**PAPER SPECS:** **Word limit = 500**, typed double-spaced with one-inch margins, 12-point Times Roman font. Include your name & student ID, Assignment #, and "Word Count = 000"

# References

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