

ACTIVE MEMBERSHIPS IN INDIVIDUAL TYPES OF VOLUNTARY ASSOCIATIONS: A MULTINATIONAL COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS*

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ABSTRACT

In furthering the investigation regarding the United States as a “nation of joiners,” this study goes beyond the comparison of nominal voluntary association memberships, examining nations’ levels of active memberships based on the assumption that active volunteering is a more accurate indicator of a nation’s true level of civic engagement. The following two questions are examined: 1) is the U.S. comparatively a “nation of joiners” in terms of active voluntary association memberships? And 2) in what types of associations are nations’ active memberships focused? To answer these questions, active memberships in religious, union, sports/recreation, education/cultural, and political associations are analyzed. Findings showed that the U.S. was comparatively a “nation of joiners” in terms of active religious memberships and education/cultural memberships, but had a high level of active joiners only in the former type of association. Among the “nations of joiners” in terms of the other types of associations included in the study, active memberships in Romania, Sweden, and China, were overwhelmingly focused in union, sports/recreation, and political associations, respectively.

INTRODUCTION

It has been suggested that the U.S. is a “nation of joiners” (Tocqueville [1835] 1966) due to an exceptional level of civic engagement (Bryce 1910; Curtis et al. 1992; Lipset 1963, 1985, 1986), yet this comparative assumption has received little attention in the literature (Booth 1975; Curtis 1971; Curtis et al. 1992). Of the studies that have been conducted, most have focused on aggregate memberships (membership or active membership in at least one of a variety of voluntary associations), including and excluding church and/or union associations (Almond and Verba 1963; Curtis 1971; Curtis et al. 1992; Curtis et al. 2001; Lipset 1985). Such analyses may have failed to provide comprehensive examinations of nations’ levels of volunteerism, as

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aggregate measures have said little about where nations' volunteering efforts are focused. While a recent study (Lawson and Liu 2005) examined memberships in individual types of associations, providing a more in-depth assessment of civic engagement, this analysis, too, may not have provided the best measure when attempting to accurately compare nations' levels of volunteerism due to its sole focus on nominal memberships. As Curtis et al. (1992) noted, a better understanding of civic engagement will be achieved when involvement is separated into memberships and *activity*. One can be a member of an academic honor society, for instance, and never attend a meeting. Therefore, measuring civic engagement in terms of active memberships in individual types of associations might be useful because: 1) it will allow for a more in-depth analysis of civic engagement than studies that have focused on aggregate memberships, and 2) it may provide a more accurate assessment of the U.S. as a "nation of joiners" because of its focus on active involvement.

The current study seeks to answer the following questions: 1) is the U.S. comparatively a "nation of joiners" in terms of *active* memberships in individual types of voluntary associations? And 2) in what types of associations are nations' *active* memberships focused? To answer these questions, twenty-five nations are compared in terms of active memberships in religious, union, sports/recreation, education/cultural, and political associations, both before and after controlling for education, income, health, age and sex. Data from multinational random samples gathered in 1990 and 1991 are used.

Active Memberships in the United States and Other Nations

Curtis et al. (1989) are among the few that have analyzed cross-national civic engagement while differentiating between nominal and active memberships. Based on a 1983 nationally administered questionnaire, respondents from the U.S. and Canada were presented

with a list of ten types of voluntary associations and were asked, “(1) which, if any, of the following do you belong to? (2) And do you currently do any unpaid volunteer work for any of them” (Curtis et al. 1989:147). Twenty-three percent of the U.S. respondents reported doing unpaid work for churches and religious organizations compared to 16 percent of Canadians. Other than these types of associations, the U.S. ranked higher than Canadians only in unpaid work for professional associations (5% vs. 4%). Canada ranked higher in terms of labor unions (2% vs. 1%), and charities (10% vs. 7%). The two countries were tied in terms of unpaid work in education or arts associations (5%), political parties (4%), conservation associations (2%), youth groups (8%), human rights groups (2%), and consumer groups (1%).

Adding additional nations, Curtis et al. (1992) conducted a fifteen-country analysis of working voluntary association memberships. Based on the following ten categories—charities, churches or religious organizations, education or arts groups, trade unions, political parties or groups, human rights organizations, conservation or environmental groups, youth work, consumer groups, professional associations and ‘none of these’ (Curtis et al. 1992:142)—respondents were asked for which they were currently doing unpaid work. Total working memberships (memberships in at least one association), total working memberships excluding churches or religious associations, total working memberships excluding union associations, and total working memberships excluding churches or religious and union associations were compared. Curtis et al. (1992) found that Canada (32.9%) ranked first in terms of total working memberships, closely followed by the U.S. (31.8%). All other nations had proportions under 30 percent, with Japan ranking lowest with 13.4 percent of respondents indicating that they had engaged in unpaid work for at least one of the ten types of associations.

When working church or religious organizations were excluded, Canada still recorded the

highest levels and Norway, Australia, the Netherlands, and Sweden all ranked higher than the U.S. When working union memberships were excluded, Canada again ranked highest, while the U.S. ranked second. When both working church or religious and working union memberships were excluded from the analysis, once again Canada ranked first, while levels in the Netherlands and Australia also topped the U.S. level.

Lawson and Liu (2005) recently conducted a twenty-five-country, cross-national analysis of individual nominal memberships in religious, union, sports or recreation, education or cultural, and political associations, finding that the U.S. (47.4%) had by far the highest level of nominal religious memberships. Russia (62.1%) recorded the highest level of nominal union memberships, the Netherlands the highest level of nominal sports or recreation (42.1%) and education or cultural (35.4%) memberships, and China (25.9%) the highest level of nominal political memberships.

More recently, Curtis et al. (2001) conducted a thirty-three-country, cross-national analysis of working memberships based on total working memberships, total working memberships excluding working union memberships, and total working memberships excluding working religious and working union memberships. The U.S. ranked first in terms of total working memberships and in terms of total working memberships excluding working union memberships. However, when both working religious and union memberships were excluded, working membership levels in Canada and Finland exceed that of the U.S. (Curtis et al. 2001).

Summary

The current study investigates if the U.S. is a “nation of joiners” in terms of *active* memberships in individual types of voluntary associations. Previous studies suggest that Canada, Russia, the Netherlands, China, Norway, Australia, Sweden and/or perhaps Finland might be

more active in individual associations than the U.S. The current study also seeks to determine where nations' active memberships are focused. Some studies examining working memberships have included only the U.S. and Canada, while other studies have only focused on total working memberships with and without the inclusion of religious and or union memberships. The current study will help determine where nations' active volunteering efforts are focused based on many countries and several different types of individual working associations. Twenty-five nations are compared in terms of active memberships in religious, union, sports/recreation, education/cultural, and political associations, both before and after controlling for education, income, health, age and sex. Data from multinational random samples gathered in 1990 and 1991 are used.

METHODS

Sample

The current study used data gathered from twenty-five countries collected in 1990 and 1991 in the World Values Survey of 1990 to 1993 (World Values Study Group 1994). This survey began as the European Values System Study Group, which was first carried out in ten West Europe societies in 1981 and then in fourteen additional countries outside of Europe. Now the survey specializes in obtaining data to be used for multinational comparative studies of values, norms, and attitudes. Probability samples from forty-five countries from a variety of geographical locations are used.¹ The survey, based on random and quota sampling and employing the use of weighted data, was conducted with face-to-face interviews. The universe of respondents consisted of adults 18 years of age and older.

¹ The current study was restricted to twenty-five countries because information on voluntary association memberships/activities and on the other variables was not collected for all nations.

Measurement

Active voluntary association memberships were measured by asking respondents “which, if any, are you currently doing unpaid work for?” Included in the response categories were: 1) Religious or church organizations, 2) education, arts, music, or cultural associations, 3) trade unions, 4) political parties or groups, and 5) associations concerned with sports or recreation.

The percentage of those actively involved in each of these associations was determined and then logistic regression was used after the implementation of controls for education, income, health, age, and sex. Logistic regression was used in order to understand if cross-national variations in active memberships were statistically significant. The use of controls allowed for a better understanding of how these active memberships differed by country as well as additional cultural factors.

Independent Variables and Controls

Countries examined in this study are located throughout five main geographical areas, including: 1) North American, 2) South America, 3) East Europe, 4) West Europe, and 5) Asia. This diversity allowed for a comprehensive assessment of civic engagement.²

Education was measured by the question, “At what age did you or will you complete your full time education, either at school or at an institution of higher education?” To measure health, respondents were asked, “All in all, how would you describe your state of health these days?” The responses ranged from very good to very poor. While there were no equivalent, income was measured from low to high. Sex was measured as male or female. Additional information can be acquired from the World Values Study Group (1994).

Summary

Is the U.S. comparatively a “nation of joiners” in terms of active voluntary association

² Table 2 includes a list of all of the countries (independent variables) included in the current study.

memberships? In what types of associations are nations' active memberships focused? In order to evaluate these questions it is necessary to look beyond nominal aggregate and individual memberships. For one can be a member of an association and never be actively engaged. Therefore, the current study adds to the literature concerning cross-national volunteerism by specifically comparing nations' active involvement in five types of individual voluntary associations in twenty-five countries.

RESULTS

General Information About the Variables

Reported in Table 1 are the means and standard deviations of all of the variables included in the current analysis. Seven percent of the respondents were active members of religious associations, 4 percent were active members of union associations, 7 percent were active members of sports or recreation associations, 5 percent were active members of education or cultural associations, and 4 percent were active members of political associations. The respondents' mean level of education was 6.17, which meant that on average, respondents had completed their education at approximately 17 years of age. The mean income for all respondents was 4.52 on a scale of 1 to 10, low to high. The mean level of health was 3.68 indicating that on average, the respondents felt between fair and good. Approximately 52 percent of the respondents were female, and the average age of the respondents was approximately 42.5 years.

TABLE 1. Variable Means and Standard Deviations

Variables	Means	Std. Dev.	n
Religious (1 = Work)	.07	.26	37168
Unions	.04	.18	37168
Sports/Recreation	.07	.25	37168
Education/Culture	.05	.21	37168
Political Parties	.04	.19	37168
Education	6.17	3.08	34810
Income	4.52	2.50	33240
Health	3.68	.94	36857
Sex (1=Male)	4.87	.50	37100
Age	42.48	16.66	37005

Is the United States More Likely than Other Nations to Have Active Memberships in Religious, Union, Sports/Recreation, Education/Cultural, or Political Associations?

The objective of this section was to assess nations' levels of civic engagement in terms of active memberships in individual types of voluntary associations both before and after controlling for education, income, health, sex, and age. Results were presented in Tables 2, 3, and 4. Table 2 provided percentages of respondents from each country who were active in each of five types of voluntary associations. Data presented in Table 3 under the columns headed "*Religious*," "*Union*," "*Sports/Recreation*," "*Education/Cultural*," and "*Political*," described significant cross-national differences in active memberships in these types of associations after the implementation of controls. Data in Table 4 under the headings labeled "*Religious*," "*Union*," "*Sports/Recreation*," "*Education/Cultural*," and "*Political*," indicated what control variables significantly affected active memberships in each of these types of associations.

Active Religious or Church Memberships

The United States (27.9%) was most likely to be a "nation of joiners" in terms of active religious memberships (see Table 2). All other countries had considerably lower levels of active religious memberships compared to the U.S.

After controlling, China ($\beta = .54$) the Netherlands ($\beta = -.25$), Canada ($\beta = -.29$), Finland ($\beta = -.41$), Latvia ($\beta = -.64$), and East Germany ($\beta = -.07$) were not statistically significantly

different than the U.S. in terms of the likelihood of having active religious memberships (see Table 3). Education ($\beta = .10$) and health ($\beta = .10$) significantly affected active religious memberships cross-nationally (see Table 4). Differences in these variables partly explained differences in active religious memberships among the above-mentioned countries and U.S.

Table 2. Percentage of Respondents Reporting Active Memberships in Individual Associations: Twenty-Five Countries, (1990-1991)

Country	Cases	Religious	Unions	Sports/Recreation	Education/Cultural	Political
United States	2020	27.9	1.7	8.3	9.9	4.7
China	1330	2.5	0.8	6.7	8.2	19.3
Finland	591	6.4	8.0	15.9	8.5	6.8
Canada	1738	15.5	3.6	12.3	9.2	3.7
E. Germany	1343	8.5	10.3	11.2	3.6	5.7
Sweden	1052	2.8	6.3	17.1	3.2	4.0
Norway	1245	5.9	6.1	13.9	5.4	3.6
Latvia	907	3.2	9.2	8.8	4.5	6.0
Netherlands	525	9.9	1.3	9.0	9.5	2.7
W. Germany	3090	7.1	1.7	10.5	4.1	2.8
Chile	1507	11.9	2.1	6.5	6.2	2.3
Belgium	309	6.8	1.9	6.1	7.4	1.6
Italy	2318	7.4	2.3	7.4	3.4	4.2
Mexico	1538	9.5	1.9	4.5	5.2	3.1
Austria	1467	5.7	2.4	7.4	4.3	3.3
Brazil	1756	12.6	1.7	3.6	2.8	2.3
Romania	1108	4.3	14.2	2.7	1.4	2.2
France	2819	4.8	2.4	6.2	4.6	1.6
Russia	2104	0.9	7.4	3.1	2.4	4.4
Bulgaria	1039	2.4	4.5	3.6	2.7	4.6
Hungary	1004	2.6	4.6	1.7	1.9	1.2
Argentina	1007	4.8	0.5	1.8	3.9	0.9
Slovenia	1040	2.0	1.7	3.0	3.2	1.3
Japan	2235	2.5	1.4	2.8	3.0	1.4
Spain	2078	2.1	0.7	1.3	1.3	0.5

Active Union Memberships

Romania (14.2%) was most likely to be a “nation of joiners” when active union memberships were considered (see Table 2). The level of U.S. (1.7%) active union memberships placed the country among the lowest in terms of these types of associations. Six other countries had considerably higher levels of active union memberships than the U.S. These countries were: East Germany (10.3%), Latvia (9.2%), Finland (8.0%), Russia (7.4%), Sweden (6.3%), and Norway (6.1%). The other 17 countries were equal or similar to the U.S. in terms of active union

memberships.

After controlling, several significant changes occurred. West Germany ($\beta = -.11$) and Spain ($\beta = -.99$)³ became significantly less likely to have active union memberships than the U.S.

(see Table 3). Italy ($\beta = .76$), Hungary ($\beta = .79$), and Bulgaria ($\beta = .77$) became significantly more likely than the U.S. to have active union memberships. Education ($\beta = .07$), income ($\beta = .08$), age ($\beta = -.01$), and sex ($\beta = -.56$) significantly affected active union memberships and thus partly explained significant differences in levels of involvement in this type of association between these countries and the U.S. (see Table 4).

Country	Religious		Union		Sports/Recreation	
	β	Exp (β)	β	Exp (β)	β	Exp (β)
China	.54 (.33) ^b	1.72	-.84 (.50)	.43	-.89*** (.25)	.41
Finland	-.41 (.27)	.67	.90** (.32)	2.45	.18 (.19)	1.20
Canada	-.29 (.15)	.75	.38 (.31)	1.46	.06 (.16)	1.06
E. Germany	-.07 (.19)	.93	1.88*** (.28)	6.53	.28 (.17)	1.33
Sweden	-1.19*** (.34)	.31	1.17*** (.32)	3.23	.66*** (.18)	1.93
Norway	-.71** (.24)	.49	1.04*** (.30)	2.82	.44** (.17)	1.55
Latvia	-.64 (.38)	.53	1.63*** (.33)	5.12	.35 (.23)	1.41
Netherlands	-.25 (.27)	.78	-.50 (.67)	.61	-.12 (.29)	.88
W. Germany	-.85*** (.16)	.43	-.11*** (.34)	.90	.36* (.15)	1.42
Chile	-.88*** (.15)	.42	-.05 (.34)	.95	-.64*** (.18)	.53
Belgium	-.98* (.43)	.37	.32 (.61)	1.38	-.72 (.44)	.49
Italy	-1.50*** (.18)	.22	.76* (.31)	2.14	-.56** (.20)	.57
Mexico	-1.57*** (.19)	.21	.34 (.36)	1.40	-.29*** (.26)	.28
Austria	-1.47*** (.19)	.23	.36 (.33)	1.43	-.28 (.19)	.75
Brazil	-.60*** (.18)	.55	.38 (.37)	1.46	-1.08*** (.26)	.34
Romania	-1.53*** (.22)	.22	2.24*** (.27)	9.35	-2.04*** (.36)	.13
France	-.63*** (.18)	.53	.19 (.31)	1.21	-.13 (.21)	.88
Russia	-1.53*** (.34)	.22	1.39*** (.28)	4.01	-1.00*** (.21)	.37
Bulgaria	-1.50*** (.32)	.22	.77* (.31)	2.16	-1.13*** (.26)	.32
Hungary	-1.56*** (.30)	.21	.79* (.36)	2.19	-2.00*** (.47)	.14
Argentina	-1.81*** (.28)	.16	-1.63 (1.02)	.20	-1.56*** (.21)	.21
Slovenia	-2.71*** (.31)	.07	.09 (.36)	1.09	-1.35*** (.27)	.26
Japan	-1.63*** (.22)	.20	-.62 (.34)	.54	-1.35*** (.20)	.26
Spain	-2.43*** (.26)	.09	-1.00* (.49)	.37	-1.85*** (.31)	.16
Constant	-7.86		-3.98		-3.74	
χ^2	2563.62		609.89		1004.52	
df=	31		31		31	

³ This number is rounded to -1.00 in Table 19.

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$, two-tailed tests.

^a Control variables are education, income, health, age, and sex.

^b Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Note: Reference category is the United States.

Table 3. (Cont.) Logistic Regression Coefficients for Effect of Country on Volunteering Odds, With Controls, for Active Memberships in Individual Associations: Twenty-Five Countries, (1990-1991)^a

Country	Education/Cultural		Political	
	β	Exp (β)	β	Exp (β)
China	.29 (.23) ^b	1.34	2.34***	10.39
Finland	-.59* (.25)	.56	.34	1.40
Canada	-.07 (.17)	.93	-.55	.58
E. Germany	-.43 (.24)	.65	.94***	2.55
Sweden	-.93** (.31)	.39	-.13	.88
Norway	-.62** (.23)	.54	-.30	.74
Latvia	-.71* (.35)	.49	.47	1.60
Netherlands	.42 (.26)	1.52	-.83	.44
W. Germany	-.38 (.20)	.68	-.05	.95
Chile	-.30 (.18)	.74	-.44	.64
Belgium	-.04 (.39)	1.00	-.81	.44
Italy	-.50* (.23)	.61	.39	1.48
Mexico	-1.22*** (.31)	.29	-.32	.73
Austria	-.80*** (.23)	.45	.08	1.08
Brazil	-.37 (.29)	.69	.07	1.07
Romania	-1.99*** (.40)	.14	-.69*	.50
France	-.18 (.18)	.83	-.81**	.45
Russia	-.69** (.23)	.50	.39	1.48
Bulgaria	-1.14*** (.30)	.32	.25	1.28
Hungary	-1.53** (.47)	.22	-.81	.45
Argentina	-.58 (.31)	.56	-1.11	.33
Slovenia	-1.03*** (.27)	.36	-.98*	.38
Japan	-.86*** (.20)	.42	-1.17***	.31
Spain	-1.50*** (.33)	.22	-1.26**	.28
Constant	-6.40		-6.21	
χ^2	553.92		694.67	
df	31		31	

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$, two-tailed tests.

^a Control variables are education, income, health, age, and sex.

^b Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Note: Reference category is the United States.

Active Sports/Recreation Memberships

Sweden (17.1%) was most likely to be the “nation of joiners” in terms of active sports or recreation memberships (see Table 2). Finland (15.9%) and Norway (13.9%) had considerably higher proportions of respondents involved in these types of associations than the U.S. (8.3%). Eleven countries had similar proportions compared to the U.S. These countries were: Canada (12.3%) East Germany (11.2%), West Germany (10.5%), Netherlands (9.0%), Latvia (8.8%),

Italy (7.4%), Austria (7.4%), China (6.7%), Chile (6.5%), France (6.2%), and Belgium (6.1%).

The rest of the countries were notably lower in levels of active sports or recreation memberships compared to the U.S.

After controlling, the likelihood of having active sports or recreation memberships in Finland ($\beta = .18$) was not significantly different than in the U.S., and West Germany ($\beta = .36$) became significantly more likely to have these types of active memberships compared to the U.S. (see Table 3). Italy ($\beta = -.56$), China ($\beta = -.89$), and Chile ($\beta = -.64$), became significantly less likely to have these types of active memberships compared to the U.S. Education ($\beta = .07$), income ($\beta = .06$), health ($\beta = .13$), age ($\beta = -.02$), and sex ($\beta = -.99$), all had significant impacts on active sports or recreation memberships (see Table 4). Differences in these variables partly explained differences in active sports or recreation memberships in the U.S. and the above-mentioned countries.

Predictors	Religious		Union		Sports/Recreation	
	β	Exp (β)	β	Exp (β)	β	Exp (β)
Education	.10*** (.01)	1.11	.07*** (.02)	1.07	.07*** (.01)	1.07
Income	-.03 (.02)	.97	.08*** (.02)	1.08	.06*** (.01)	1.06
Health	.10* (.04)	1.10	.03 (.05)	1.03	.13** (.04)	1.13
Age	.004 (.003)	1.00	-.01* (.003)	.99	-.02*** (.003)	.99
Sex	.01 (.07)	1.01	-.56*** (.08)	.57	-.99*** (.07)	.37
Predictors	Education/Cultural		Political			
	β	Exp (β)	β	Exp (β)		
Education	1.22*** (.02)	1.22	.14*** (.02)	1.16		
Income	1.05** (.02)	1.05	.04 (.02)	1.04		
Health	1.19*** (.05)	1.19	.14* (.05)	1.15		
Age	1.00 (.003)	1.00	.02*** (.004)	1.02		
Sex	1.03 (.08)	1.03	-.81*** (.09)	.44		

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$, two-tailed tests.

^a Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Note: Reference categories are: education, 21+ years; income, highest; health, very good; age, 99; and sex, male.

Active Education/Cultural Memberships

The United States (9.9%) was most likely to be a “nation of joiners” in terms of active

education or cultural memberships (see Table 2). The Netherlands (9.5%), Canada (9.2%), Finland (8.5%), China (8.2%), Belgium (7.4%), and Chile (6.2%), were all similar to the U.S. in terms of activity in these types of associations. The other 18 countries had considerably lower proportions of active education or cultural memberships compared to the U.S.

After controlling, Finland ($\beta = -.59$) became significantly less likely to have active education or cultural memberships compared to the U.S., while France ($\beta = -.18$), West Germany ($\beta = -.38$), Argentina ($\beta = -.93$), Brazil ($\beta = -.37$), and East Germany ($\beta = -.37$) showed no significant difference compared to the U.S. (see Table 3). Education ($\beta = .20$), income ($\beta = .05$), and health ($\beta = .17$), significantly affected active education or cultural memberships (see Table 4). Differences in these variables partly explained differences in active education or cultural memberships between the U.S. and the above-mentioned countries.

Active Political Memberships

China (19.3%) was by far most likely a “nation of joiners” in terms of active political memberships, while all countries except Argentina (0.9%) and Spain (0.5%) had similar levels of involvement compared to the U.S. (4.7%, see Table 2).

After controlling, East Germany ($\beta = .94$) became significantly more likely to have active political memberships compared to the U.S. (see Table 3). Argentina ($\beta = -1.11$) showed no statistically difference compared to the U.S., and France ($\beta = -.81$), Japan ($\beta = -.1.17$), Slovenia ($\beta = -.98$), and Romania ($\beta = -.69$) became significantly lower in terms of the likelihood of having active political memberships compared to the U.S. Education ($\beta = .14$), health ($\beta = .14$), age ($\beta = .02$), and sex ($\beta = -.81$), significantly affected active political memberships (see Table 4). Differences in these variables partly explained differences in active political memberships in the U.S. and the above-mentioned countries.

SUMMARY

The current study sought to answer the following two questions: 1) is the U.S. comparatively a “nation of joiners” in terms of active voluntary association memberships? And 2) in what types of associations are nations’ active memberships focused? It was suggested that active memberships might be a better indicator of nations’ levels of civic engagement because such a measure actually assesses involvement. According to the current analysis it was apparent that differentiating between nominal and active memberships did indeed illustrate a sharp contrast in proportions of *involved* respondents.

In answer to the first question, the U.S. was a “nation of joiners” in terms of active religious memberships and in terms of active education or cultural memberships. Just as Curtis et al. (1989) and Lawson and Liu (2005) found that the U.S. ranked first in terms of nominal religious memberships and that U.S. strength in nominal individual membership was centered on religious involvement, so too was it the case with U.S. active membership. However, there was a sharp contrast in terms of the proportion of nominal religious memberships (47.4%) found by Lawson and Liu (2005) and active religious memberships (27.9%) found in the current study. This demonstrates the need for assessing civic engagement based on a variety of measures.

The United States’ strength in religious activities was previously noted by Curtis et al. (1989), who found that those involved in churches or religious activities in the U.S. was higher than in Canada (23% vs. 16%). Findings from the current study were also consistent with those found by Curtis et al. (1992), who indicated that while the U.S. placed second in terms of total working memberships, after church or religious activities were excluded from their analysis the U.S. dropped to sixth place.

The United States' top placing in terms of active education or cultural memberships indicated in the current study did not represent much change from its second place ranking in terms of education or cultural nominal memberships (Lawson and Liu 2005). However, again, there was a notable decrease in the proportion of active U.S. respondents (9.9%) and the proportion of nominal U.S. respondents (20.2%, Lawson and Liu 2005). The contrast between proportions of nominal and active memberships was also made clear in the case of the Netherlands, which ranked first (35.4%) in terms of nominal education or cultural memberships (Lawson and Liu 2005), but which had a much lower proportion of respondents who were actively involved (9.5%). While comparatively the U.S. was the "nation of joiners" in terms of active education or cultural memberships, at just 9.9 percent, it is difficult to argue that the U.S. is very involved in these types of associations.

Romania (14.2%) was most rightfully considered the "nation of joiners" in terms of active union memberships. This represented a dramatic change compared to its eighth place ranking in terms of nominal union memberships (Lawson and Liu 2005), and again helps to illustrate the importance of assessing civic engagement based on a variety of measures. Differentiating between individual nominal memberships and individual active memberships illustrated a sharp contrast in proportions of respondents. Russia had a much higher level of nominal union memberships (62.1%, Lawson and Liu 2005) than active union memberships (7.4%). Further, Russia, which had the highest proportion of respondents belonging to union associations (Lawson and Liu 2005), placed fifth in terms of union activities. The seventeenth place ranking of the U.S. (1.7%) in terms of active union memberships, hardly indicative of "nation of joiner" status, also highlights the need to base studies of cross-national volunteerism on a variety of measures.

Sweden (17.1%) was most likely to be a “nation of joiners” in terms of active sports or recreation memberships. This did not represent much of a shift from its third place ranking in nominal memberships (32.1%) in these types of associations (Lawson and Liu 2005), however, it did represent a considerably lower proportion of respondents. The U.S. ranked ninth in terms of these types of active memberships, not much shift from its eighth place ranking in terms of nominal sports or recreation associations (Lawson and Liu 2005). Once again, there were considerably less active members of sports or recreation associations in the U.S. (8.3) than nominal members (20.7%, Lawson and Liu 2005).

Finally, China (19.3%) was by far most likely to be a “nation of joiners” in terms of active political memberships. This did not represent any shift for China (1st) in terms of nominal political memberships (Lawson and Liu 2005). Nor did it represent much of a contrast in terms of China’s (25.9%) proportion of nominal memberships in political associations (Lawson and Liu 2005). However, due to limitations in sampling, urban dwelling, literate respondents were over represented in the Chinese sample. Thus, results may have been somewhat biased. Further, just as others (Curtis et al. 2001; Lawson and Liu 2005) have noted that caution needs to be taken when labeling union memberships as *voluntary* associations, so too is it possible that caution should be taken when labeling political memberships in China as voluntary. All other countries had very low levels of active political memberships.

In terms of the second question that the current study attempted to address, it was apparent that in the U.S. active memberships occurred mainly in the form of religious involvement. This is possibly explained by the freedom of religious expression enjoyed in the U.S., which provides people with a wide variety of choices in terms religious activities (Curtis et al. 1992). In terms of those countries that were “nations of joiners” in the other individual active

memberships examined in the current study, volunteering was focused in a variety of areas. Active volunteering in Romania was overwhelmingly focused in unions. In no other individual association covered in the current study did Romania have more than a 4.5 percent proportion of involved respondents. There was the same focus in Sweden in terms of active sports or recreation memberships. The highest proportion of respondents for Sweden in any of the other associations was lower than 6.5 percent. Finally, active volunteering in China centered on political memberships. The greatest proportion of respondents in China in any of the other associations was under 8.5 percent.

Analyses were conducted after controls for education, income, health, age, and sex were implemented in order to better understand if cross-national differences in active civic engagement were based on differences in these variables or by nation and other cultural factors. It was evident that differences in these controls did partly explain cross-national differences in active memberships. Active religious memberships in China, the Netherlands, Canada, Finland, Latvia and East Germany were not significantly different than in the U.S. after the implementation of these control variables. West Germany and Spain became significantly less likely to have active union memberships compared to the U.S., while Italy, Hungary, and Bulgaria became significantly more likely. Active sports or recreation memberships in West Germany became significantly higher than the U.S., while in Italy, China, and Chile they became significantly lower. Active education or cultural memberships in Finland became significantly lower compared to the U.S. level. Finally, East Germany became significantly more likely to have active political membership than the U.S., while France, Japan, Slovenia, and Romania became significantly less likely to have these types of active memberships. Cross-national differences in education, income, health, age, and sex partly explained differences in levels of

active memberships between the U.S. and the above-mentioned countries and should be retained in future analyses.

CONCLUSION

Based on having the greatest proportion of respondents in a significant amount in only one of the five types of active memberships included in the current study, there was not much support for the U.S. as a “nation of joiners” beyond religious involvement. Further, the current study made it clear that when civic engagement was measured explicitly in terms of involvement, nations’ levels of volunteering dropped significantly from nominal levels. This suggests the need for basing cross-national studies of civic engagement on a variety of measures in order to present a more comprehensive assessment of volunteerism. The current study contained two main weaknesses. Results were based on data that were approximately fourteen-years-old, making conclusions about current patterns of volunteering perhaps precarious. Further, findings were based on an identical survey administered to a cross-national sample—people of various nations likely expressed their volunteerism in various ways. Thus, for instance, a survey that is appropriate for a U.S. sample may be less appropriate for a Chinese sample. Future analyses should be based on more recent data and perhaps on more cultural specific surveys.

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