A Resource Model of Social Capital: Networks, Recruitment and Political Participation in Sweden

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Abstract: This paper is a study of how social capital is converted into political participation. It is argued that when studying social capital as an individual determinant of individual behavior, it should not be treated as an attitude such as social trust, but rather be viewed as a resource stemming from the structure of networks surrounding an individual. Drawing on survey data from Sweden in 1997, two such facets of social capital are explored: formal networks, in the form of membership and activity in voluntary associations, and informal networks, such as bonds of verbal communication and reliance on practical assistance. Both forms of social resources are shown to affect two modes of political participation, contacting and manifestations, although to a varying degree. In addition, it is shown that parts of the mechanisms responsible for these effects are related to recruitment, both “social recruitment,” i.e., requests from friends and associates to join political action, and “political mobilization,” i.e., appeals for participation stemming from the political system itself.
Studying the relationship between social capital and political participation has some resemblance to the practice of putting new labels on old truths. The fact that voluntary associations induce political activity among their members, for example, has been known since at least *The Civic Culture* study (Almond & Verba 1963). It was explored at some length in two of the research field’s most influential studies from the 1970s (Verba & Nie 1972; Verba et al. 1978), and again a recurrent theme in the two latest participation studies from Britain and America (Parry et al. 1992; Verba et al. 1995). So why are we suddenly to be intrigued when reports on these old findings are suddenly being phrased in terms of ”social capital”? Why at all venture into such well-known territory?

The answer is, no doubt, Robert Putnam. Since the ”vibrancy of associational life” was an important component of Putnam’s (1993) nowadays so widely praised explanation of what makes democracy work, disentangling the causes and consequences of such ”civic engagement” has been one of the top priorities in the research field (Brehm & Rahn 1997; Moyser & Parry 1997; Dekker et al. 1997; Eastis 1998; Stolle 1998a, 1998b; Stolle & Rochon 1998, 1999; Lake & Huckfeldt 1998; Booth & Richard 1998a, 1998b; Hooghe 1999; Seligson 1999; Whiteley 1999). Putnam’s study of social capital, despite its conceptually vagueness and at times quite loose fit between theory and data, has proved a fruitful basis for new and important work on the workings of voluntary associations in modern democracies.

In this paper I shall follow the lead of this research agenda, drawing on a Swedish interview survey from 1997. Four things, however, set me apart from the dominant literature on the subject. First of all, I deal only in passing with the attitudinal side of social capital, such as norms or social trust. Instead, I view social capital as a resource stemming from the social networks surrounding individuals. Second, I include not only the formal networks of voluntary associations herein, but also informal networks such as friends, acquaintances, and discussion partners. Third, I will only study social capital as a determinant of political participation; other possible effects are left unexplored. Finally, the main question I want to answer is not whether social capital in the form of formal and informal networks affect the propensity to take political action. The objective is rather to give an account of why this is the case. In this search for a mechanism, rather than a causal effect in itself, I will primarily explore the ways by which people are recruited or mobilized into political action.

The paper is organized as follows. After reviewing in the next section the theory linking social capital to political participation, the data and dependent variables are presented. I then provide a separate treatment of the way recruitment, membership and activity of voluntary associations, and informal networks, respectively, affect political participation. A full model pulling together these separate parts is then presented, followed by some concluding remarks.
Social Capital Theory and Political Participation

One of the more peculiar facets of social capital theory is the elusive nature of its core concept. What is social capital? How is it to be defined theoretically and studied empirically? The literature is in dispute on these issues. The most influential definition is no doubt the one given by James Coleman (1990, 302):

Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity, but a variety of different entities having two characteristics in common: They all consist of some aspect of social structure, and they facilitate certain actions of individuals who are within the structure. Like other forms of capital, social capital is productive, making possible the achievement of certain aims that would not be attainable in its absence...Unlike other forms of capital, social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons and among persons. It is lodged neither in individuals nor in physical implements of production.

This definition is both precise and fallacious. The precision stems from how the conceptual domain of social capital is demarcated from other forms of human resources. As a property of the system of relations connecting an agent to his or her social surroundings, the concept refers neither to “physical capital,” such as material property and income, nor to "human capital,” such as knowledge and skills. The danger in defining social capital as Coleman does, however, is that it risks confusing matters of definition with matters of empirical investigation (Newton 1999, 8). To define a concept by its function implies that it cannot be empirically investigated other than in terms of a causal effect. In other words, if we fully agree with Coleman’s definition there “is” no social capital unless different "aspects of social structure” can be shown to have causal powers. But the interesting questions asked in the literature on social capital, I would argue, concerns whether it can serve as an explanatory concept. Is it really the case that social capital can accomplish such wide ranging tasks as to "improve education, diminish poverty, inhibit crime, boost economic performance, foster better government, and even reduce mortality rates” (Putnam 1997, 27)? These are the important questions social scientists should try to answer. Defining social capital by its function, however, is to deprive the concept of its explanatory force. For this reason, I argue the functional aspect of Coleman’s definition should be dropped. What remains is the view that “social capital inheres in the structure of relations between persons”.

This nevertheless still leaves a wide range of alternative uses of the word unspecified. In Putnam’s own interpretation of his empirical findings from Italy’s regions, he defines social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (Putnam 1993, 167). The same definition recurs in Putnam’s later writings (Putnam 1995a, 67; Putnam 1995b, 664f). Apart from being a clear illustration of the functional fallacy referred to above, this usage points to a bifurcation in the literature following Putnam’s trail, where some by social capital refer to attitudes, such as norms, social trust and tolerance, while others primarily tend to conceptualize it as a social structure, such as informal networks and formal groups (Foley &
Edwards 1998, 4; Newton 1999, 4-7).¹ On this issue I will take stand for the latter usage of the term. When studying social and political processes at the individual level, as I do, treating social capital as an attitude would be to abandon its conceptual core. Whether people trust, tolerate and abide to norms of reciprocity is no doubt an important object of study, but as individual properties such attitudes have nothing to do with the structural relations surrounding a particular individual. I can trust every person I come across, but that need not mean they trust me, nor that they trust each other. True, when measured at the individual level but then treated as aggregate characteristics of a set of individuals, norms and trust are important facets of the relations connecting people, i.e., forms of social capital. But when measured as individual attitudes towards other people and treated as determinants of individual behavior, they are not.

Thus, although I will make a cursory note on the empirical insignificance of social trust as a determinant of political participation, my main reason for leaving the attitudinal side of social capital out is conceptual. Instead, I will treat as social capital different facets of the networks connecting people to their social environment. This still makes social capital a characteristic that could be measured at the individual level. In my view, social capital is a resource of potential importance, among other things, for moving people into political action. It is a social resource, however, not an economic asset or a cognitive disposition. Although they might be empirically linked, social resources and socioeconomic status are thus still treated as theoretically separate entities.

Why would we expect social networks to promote political participation? According to some theoretical expectations posited by Miller (1998, 8f), social ties give people "a greater stake in the community" and "a sense of empowerment". In addition, social interaction induces a "socialization experience," which promote certain types of behavior. I consider those mechanisms a bit too opaque, however, and will not explore them further here. Instead I shall bring another potent strand of the participation literature to bear on this issue. In the words of Verba, Schlozman & Brady (1995, 15), we can think of three reasons why people do not take part in politics: "because they can’t; because they don’t want to; or because nobody asked". The last reason points to the potential importance of the networks through which people are recruited to politics. Of course, people interact and associate with others for many different reasons. As one of the byproducts of having access to social networks, however, "people are continually bombarded by recurrent efforts that seek to change their beliefs and behaviors" (Knoke 1990, 1042). One thing the social environment surrounding an agent might attempt is to persuade him or her to take part in political action. Thus, a potential mechanism explaining why social networks would be important to participation is through recruitment.

¹ One of the more interesting empirical contributions to the field studies both attitudes and social structural properties, but oddly enough defines social capital as being "a tight reciprocal relationship" between the two (Brehm & Rahn 1997, 1001). For a criticism of this approach, see Foley & Edwards (1998, 5f).
From social network theory we can derive certain predictions as to what characteristics of the ties connecting an agent would increase the likelihood of receiving such requests for participation. As Granovetter (1973) has argued, networks serve to structure the flow of information to actors. The core idea of his seminal paper on "the strength of weak ties" is that the amount of useful information accessible to an agent is a decreasing function of the strength of the bonds linking him or her to others. That is, the more tightly knit a network surrounding an agent, the less information will reach him. The theoretical reason to expect this is that the stronger a person's ties with his associates, the more will their friendship circles overlap. Weak ties, by contrast, increase the likelihood of being connected to diverse others, and hence to information of wider scope. Weak ties tend to be "local bridges" into sectors of the wider network surrounding an individual that he or she would otherwise not reach, and hence could not be reached by (Granovetter 1973, 1362-5). In other words, there is an inverse relationship between the strength of ties connecting an agent and the range of his network (Campbell et al. 1986, 98). Range could be measured in various ways, but two common approaches is to focus on network size and density; the former should be positively related to range, the latter negatively (Burt 1983b). Now if we apply this logic to the case of recruitment, we should expect people having access to large but loosely coupled networks to get more requests for participation. This follows from the idea that such networks link people to a wider context, and thus increases the probability of being exposed to appeals for political action. Although the logic is developed with reference to informal networks, it might easily be taken to apply in the case of formal groups as well. Involvement in multiple organizations increases the likelihood of reaching, and being reached by, many diverse others (Granovetter 1973, 1375). Hence, it increases the likelihood of being recruited to politics.

By focussing on requests for participation, we are in effect studying demand as a possible generator of the supply of political participation. The demand side has another important facet, however, one that on the face of it might seem to have no apparent link to social networks. A powerful source of requests for participation is of course the political system itself. Since the outcome of democratic politics, in the famous words of E. E. Schattschneider (1960, 2), "is determined by the extent to which the audience becomes involved in it," political organizations have a strong incentive to whip up popular expressions of support for their favored cause. That is, they deploy a strategy of mobilization by inducing people to participate, people who would have otherwise remained inactive (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, 25f). Why would access to social networks increase the likelihood of being mobilized into action by the political system? This time membership and activity in formal organizations provide the key to an answer. Seen from the perspective of a political strategist, all people are not equally swayed by appeals to participation. Even more important perhaps, all people are not equally accessible. To organize a successful mobilization campaign under time and budget constraints, efforts must therefore be made to target the requests for participation to certain
people. Since group members and activists are both more visible and more likely to have a record of being prone to action than others, they enjoy a higher probability of being targeted (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, 31f). Hence, they are more likely to be mobilized into politics.

To distinguish between requests to participate stemming from corporate political actors and solicitations from social networks of kin, friendship and acquaintances, I shall be referring to the former as "political mobilization" and to the latter as "social recruitment". When considering both sources of requests jointly, however, I shall simply be using the more generic term "recruitment". In sum, then, I conjecture two forms of social capital as being of potential importance to political participation: informal networks as well as formal group memberships and activity. In addition, a mechanism posited to convert these social resources into action is the twin processes of "social recruitment" and "political mobilization". Since I make no claims to have provided the only mechanism, we must also posit a direct link between social resources and participation. Finally, we have reasons to expect a relationship between the two forms of social resources. The argument is summarized in figure 1 into a structural model of conjectured causal relations.

[Figure 1 about here]

One final question has been left unanswered in my argument thus far: why focus on political participation in the first place? Political participation should be kept distinct from social capital, Putnam (1995b, 665) tells us, but why direct any attention to the causal linkages between the two? I believe there are two good reasons for this, one connected to the normative, the other to the empirical theory of democracy. From the perspective of political equality, which in one sense or another is what the ideal of democracy is about, the way sources structure politics is of crucial concern. As Charles Beitz (1989, 16f) amply puts it:

A requirement of equality adds something to the generic idea of democracy as self-government. This additional element is a constraint on the design of the mechanism that enables citizens to participate in public decisions, or as we might say, on the terms of democratic participation.

In other words, if an unequal distribution of resources, be they economic, cognitive or social, determines who gets a say in politics and who doesn’t, we face a problem from the perspective of normative democratic theory. A first step in assessing whether such state of affairs is at hand is to subject the model presented in figure 1 to empirical scrutiny.

Regardless of any normative concerns, however, the empirical study of democracy provides a second answer why social capital theory should be concerned about political participation. In Putnam’s argument about how social capital "makes democracy work," there is a crucial element found wanting: the mechanism linking the two. Putnam fails to specify even in theory how exactly "trust, norms and networks" impinge upon government performance. Two such mechanisms, however, has been posited in the literature (Booth & Richard 1998a, 782; 1998b,
The one concerns "attitudes supportive of democracy". Especially groups and associations of civil society are thought to foster certain democratic beliefs which limit or motive regime actions. The second mechanism, not surprisingly, is political participation. Since democratic performance implies not only getting things done (effectiveness), but getting things done in response to citizen demands (Putnam 1993, 63), a good reason to suspect political participation to be conducive to democracy is that it makes governments aware of such demands (Seligson 1999, 347). I do not have the data required to test this empirically, although earlier research has it that community leaders do respond to citizen inputs from political participation (Verba & Nie 1972, ch. 19). But at least this provides another theoretical argument for the relevance of studying the impact of social capital on participation.

What is to be explained: Two Modes of Political Participation

To test the theoretical ideas developed above, I will analyze a survey conducted on a representative sample of 1460 Swedish residents in the ages 16-80 years, the so-called Swedish Citizen Study. The field work was carried out in 1997, mainly as face-to-face interviews averaging about 75 minutes in length. The response rate was 74,3 percent. Apart from social background characteristics, the interviews covered a range of issues pertaining to the individual citizen’s capacity to influence politics and society, generally put. Of particular interest for the purpose of this paper, the survey covered memberships and activity in a broad range of voluntary associations, different types and characteristics of informal networks, a number of different political participation acts, as well as the extent to which respondents had been asked to join these acts, and the responses to and source of such requests.

In keeping with the traditional approach to political participation, I will by this be referring to "those activities by private citizens that…aim at influencing the government" (Verba & Nie 1972, 2; see Brady 1999, 737f). Table 1 summarizes the patterns that lie behind the specific responses to 13 questions about such activities. In order to restrict attention to participation of a non-particularistic nature, respondents were asked whether they during the past year had carried out any of the listed activities as an attempt "to bring about improvements or resist deterioration in society…for a cause which does not only concern yourself or your family". On the basis of factor analyses the 13 participation acts can be reduced to two more general modes of participation.

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2 Principal investigators were Anders Westholm and the author, both at the Department of Government, Uppsala University. The fieldwork was carried out by Statistics Sweden.

3 In terms of statistical significance, non-response rates were higher among middle-aged (41-60) and elderly people (71-80), within lower income groups and among immigrants and residents in large cities (Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmo). By and large, however, none of these differences are deemed large enough to substantially affect the results presented in this paper.

4 The set of items from which these 13 types of participation were drawn also included "worked in a political party," "took part in a strike," and "participated in illegal protest action". Of these the latter two are excluded due to lack of variance (1,0 % and 0,3 %, respectively, report having carried out these acts). Party work is excluded.
The first deals with *contacts* of different sorts: with politicians, government officials, organizations, the media and judicial bodies. In addition, to work in an organization other than a political party or a political action group is a part of this dimension. The second mode of participation covers a variety of actions: to work in a political action group, to wear or display a campaign badge or sticker, to sign a petition, to participate in a demonstration (other than the ritual annual demonstrations of May 1), to boycott something (e.g., certain products), to donate money and to raise funds. I am aware of no generic term for this particular set of actions in the participation literature. "Protesting" would be to narrow a description; most of the actions in this dimension could be carried out with another purpose in mind than to protest against something. In lack of better alternatives, this second mode of participation will therefore be called *manifestations* (Petersson et al. 1989; Petersson et al. 1998).

In the analyses to follow two additive scales, simply based on the number of acts within each mode of participation a respondent has carried out, will serve as our dependent variables. For sake of simplicity in interpretation, both scales are constructed so as to range from 0 to 100, where 0 means no action has been taken whereas 100 means all different types have been carried out (during the past year). The means of these indexes are 11,0 (contacting) and 18,5 (manifestations). This implies that an average citizen has performed 11 percent of the contacts, and 18,5 percent of the manifestations. The variance around this mean, however, is considerable, especially in the case of contacting.5

Contacting and manifestations could of course not be said to represent the entire action repertoire of citizens trying to influence government decisions. In particular, voting and party activity are lacking. According to the mainstream theory of representative democracy, political parties competing for votes is the principal mechanism for translating individual preferences into policy decisions. Thus, the exclusion of voting behavior and party activity means a substantial loss of information. The reason for this exclusion is simply technical: unfortunately we do not have recruitment data for these dimensions of political participation, and thus would not be able to answer the key questions of this paper with regard to them. In sum, what is to be explained is instead the propensity of individual citizens to take political

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5 The standard deviations are 19,2 (contacting) and 16,7 (manifestations).
action in arenas outside the primary channels of representative democracy, namely as contacts and manifestations.

The Logic of Requests: Social Recruitment and Political Mobilization

As a first step in the analysis we need to explore the patterns of recruitment to political participation. In the survey, respondents were in addition to reports on actual behavior asked whether they during the past year had been "personally asked to take part” in any of the listed activities, i.e., the extent to which they had received requests for participation. For each participation act the respondent had been requested to join, they were in addition asked whether they "did what they were asked to,” i.e. how they responded to the request.6

Table 2 reports the findings from these questions. In the first column actual behavior is displayed. As can be seen, the index means reported above conceal some interesting variation in the frequencies of different participation acts, especially in the case of manifestations. To sign a petition, boycott certain products or donate money is a fairly common political activity. Working in a political action group, wearing a badge or raising funds, on the other hand, is done much more rarely. The second column now suggests a possible reason for this variation. Although requests for participation is by and large less frequent than actual behavior, there is still a clear correspondence between the two. With the exception of boycotts, frequent activities are also frequently requested, relatively speaking. The same pattern holds when comparing the means across our two more general modes of participation: both requests and activities are more frequent for manifestations than contacting. Admittedly a rough test, this is a first indication of the importance of recruitment to participation.

What has to be taken into account as well, however, is the varying propensity to accept appeals for different types of participation acts. As the third column reveals, the distribution of positive and negative responses to requests differ quite considerably across activities. When being asked to sign a petition, boycott something, wear a badge or contact a government official, for example, the request is rarely turned down. On the other side of the spectrum, solicitations to work in political action groups or other organizations, or to raise funds, are far less frequently assented to. This pattern, however, is not quite consistent with the frequency of requests. Some participation acts are requested more often, but these need not be the same as those that are more easily accepted. Consequently, we must consider the joint impact of these two facets of recruitment to correctly understand its role in enhancing political participation.

6 The phrasing of these questions were inspired by the approach to recruitment deployed by Verba et al. (1995, ch. 5). For a similar approach, see also Parry et al. (1992, 86-8).
The last column of table 2 is a first way of doing this, although merely in a descriptive sense. The figures here represent the percentage of the participants in each activity who have both been asked and responded positively to the request. Most manifestations, then, are rooted in appeals for activity, while contacts to a larger extent are triggered by individual initiative. An important exception again is boycotting, an activity rarely resulting from recruitment. Among the various types of contacts, on the other hand, media contacts diverge by being relatively more often elicited through requests.

The demand for participation also varies in a third way, one of crucial importance to our understanding of the process through which recruitment generates participation. Different requests have different sources. To capture this we asked in addition for "the best description" of the person requesting each participation act. On a show card respondents could choose between two broad categories: "A person I know" and "A stranger". Below the first of these the person requesting could then be specified as being "In the family", "In my neighborhood", "At work", "From organizational life" or just known "In some other way" (i.e., just a friend or acquaintance). Below the second category the options were "From a political party", "From an organization or association", or "From some other context".

When looking at these sources of requests separately (results not shown), one finding stands out as particularly conspicuous: more than a third (37.2 %) of all appeals for political participation are triggered by strangers from organizations or associations, and about a sixth (16.1 %) is initiated by persons known from organizational life. Thus, the one leading force behinds requests, covering a majority of their total number, is the work of voluntary associations. Other sources of relative importance are the work place (13.8 %) and friends in general (12.0 %), with the rest all falling below 10 percent. This measure gives us a multifaceted picture of the locus of recruitment. For the purpose of the coming analyses, however, we shall need to reduce this information somewhat. Two distinctions can be held to be of particular importance in this regard. The first, between requests from persons known and from strangers, gives us a crude measure of whether the process should be understood as one of "social recruitment" or "political mobilization". In the latter case the direct source of the request can be more or less safely located to the political system. In the former case, requests are processed through mutual associates, be they family, friends, colleagues, neighbors or fellow members of organizations. In addition, we can make the independent distinction between requests from voluntary associations and any other sources. As already indicated by

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7 The measure is "crude" for two reasons. First, we are not able to separate "social recruitment" in the sense alluded to here from what Rosenstone & Hansen (1993, 26) term "indirect mobilization," i.e., the extent to which persons requesting in their turn have been mobilized by the political system. Second, the category "a stranger from another context" is conceptually vague and could for example include appeals for participation from (extra)ordinary citizens trying to whip up support for political action by asking perfect strangers. To solve the first problem we would need an entirely different set of data. As regards the second, we can at least be reassured by the empirical insignificance of such requests: they only amount to 8.1 percent of the total number of requests.
the overall results, this must be deemed crucial for understanding the mechanisms through which organizational memberships and activity generates participation.

By crossing these two distinctions we get a typology of four types of sources: being asked by a person known from organizational life or from another context, or being asked by a stranger from an organization or from another context. The more condensed picture produced by this typology appears in table 3. The first column shows how the requests for our two modes of participation are distributed among the four types of sources. In the case of contacting, nearly half of the requests come from family, friends, colleagues and neighbors. Second in importance is recruitment from fellow members. Together, these two sources of "social recruitment" make up 74.7 percent of the total number of requests. Thus, "political mobilization" is in this case of much less importance, only accounting for the remaining 25.3 percent. With regard to manifestations, on the other hand, solicitations to participate from strangers in organizations or associations is the source of utmost importance. Second to this comes recruitment efforts by persons known from other contexts than organizational life, with fellow members this time accounting for far less an amount. As is evident, requests to join manifestations are primarily generated through "political mobilization" (57.7 % as opposed to 42.3 % through "social recruitment").

[Table 3 about here]

Here again, however, we must also pay attention to the varying propensity to assent to those requests made. The second column shows that this propensity is much stronger when the requesting person is someone one knows. Although this makes perfectly sense, there is an important difference in this regard between the two modes of participation. Requests from associates are more easily rejected when they concern contacts. The strong willingness to accept appeals for manifestations when they come from family, friends, neighbors, colleagues and fellow members increases the overall importance of "social recruitment" in this mode of participation. When we look at the percentage of the participants in each mode who have both been asked and responded positively (the third column), both mechanisms of recruitment appear to be of equal importance to manifestations: 50.6 percent is generated through "social recruitment", 49.4 percent through "political mobilization". In the case of contacting, by contrast, the former process is far more important, accounting for 83.7 percent versus 16.3 percent of the total amount of successful recruitment.

It is now time to turn from this descriptive mapping of the recruitment process to studying its causal impact. To what extent does the logic of requests help us explain why some people participate while some remain inactive? To answer this question we shall turn to regression analysis, with the recruitment measures inserted as independent variables. In keeping with the findings so far, both the number of requests received by an individual and his or her
willingness to heed the call must then be taken into account. To exclude the latter part of the process would bias the results, since we know now that the propensity to accept appeals vary both across participation acts and sources of requests. The solution I have opted for is therefore to create recruitment variables that sum the number of accepted requests for each mode of participation. As in the case of our dependent variables, these scales run from 0 to 100. Thus, they in effect represent the proportion of possible participation acts within each mode to which the respondents have accepted a request to take part. An example should clarify the logic. Imagine a respondent has been asked to contact a politician and to contact a government official, turned the first request down but accepted the latter. He or she would then receive the value of 16.7 on the recruitment scale for contacting, since theoretically there are six different acts within this mode of participation but the respondent has only accepted one of them (1/6 = 0.167). If the same respondent would have received no requests at all, or had turned down requests to take part in all of the contact acts, he would of course have received the value of 0.

To reflect the different sources of requests, variants of these recruitment variables are then easily constructed. More specifically, this means the recruitment scale for each mode of participation is separated into different sub-scales: two representing the general mechanisms of ”social recruitment” and ”political mobilization,” and four representing the even more detailed types of sources (i.e., asked by a person known from organizational life or from another context, and asked by a stranger from an organization/association or from another context). In the case of contacting, however, the amount of successful recruitment generated through ”political mobilization” is exceedingly small in itself (the mean of the scale is 0.45, with only 20 respondents having values greater than zero), so here we must refrain from separating the two more detailed sub-types.

The results from regressing our two dependent variables on these variants of the recruitment scales are presented in table 4. At first sight they may come as a surprise. To begin with, the effects of recruitment on contacting are without exception larger than the effects on manifestations. This might seem to contradict the patterns portrayed in table 2 above, where it was shown that manifestations to a larger extent than contacting were rooted in recruitment. Moreover, the different types of sources now appear to have effects of

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**Footnote:**

8 An alternative specification might have been to model the joint effect as an interaction term. Due to severe multicollinearity, however, I am not quite clear about how this should best be done. For sake of simplicity, I have therefore decided not to pursue that path in this paper. The price paid for any approach that includes the response to requests as an explanatory variable is a quite substantial amount of heteroscedasticity. The reason for this is that each level of a response variable lays a floor below which there could be no respondents that are inactive (since a positive response per definition implies activity). As a result, the variance of the residuals from regressing activity on successful recruitment will decrease in proportion to the number of successful recruitments. Since the regression coefficients are still unbiased in the presence of heteroscedasticity, this need not be a problem of great concern to us. The standard errors, however, will be inflated. If we would correct for this bias through some WLS procedure, then, our regression coefficients would be even more significant than they appear to be when using OLS.
approximately similar magnitude, although the story told in table 3 was that different sources played different roles in enhancing participation. There is a substantive explanation to these alleged contradictions, however. What the descriptive picture hitherto presented gives is a combination of two things. First of all the strength of the causal mechanism converting requests to participate into real action, but in addition to that the extent to which efforts to recruit participants actually has taken place. By confounding these two separate dimensions into one single figure, the descriptive picture departs from the purely causal story. Since, in Sweden in 1997, calls to join manifestations were much more common than requests for contacting, recruitment was in one sense more "important" for the former mode of participation than for the latter. But in the causal sense of "importance", by contrast, the actual levels of the explanatory variables should be kept out of the picture (Achen 1982, 69-73). This is exactly the job the regression estimates in table 4 do for us.

[Table 4 about here]

As expected, all the recruitment variables have substantive and significant effects on participation. The coefficient in model C4.1, for example, means that by increasing the total amount of recruitment by 1 percentage point, the amount of contacting on average increases by 1.43 percentage points. The corresponding coefficient in model M4.1 implies that the mechanism converting recruitment into manifestations is weaker. The remaining models present a picture of the relative importance of different recruitment sources for these overall effects. With regard to both contacting and manifestations "social recruitment" no doubt has a stronger impact than "political mobilization". Being asked by a person known from either organizational life or from some other context increases the likelihood of participation more than when the requesting person is a stranger.

**Formal Networks: Membership and Activity in Voluntary Associations**

We shall now turn to the first part of our question regarding the impact of social resources on participation by considering formal networks, such as voluntary associations. Do we find the expected relationship between being a member or active in a voluntary association and being politically active? Does this relationship differ between members only and people also being active in the organization? And most importantly, can the effect be explained with reference to the recruitment process?

The Swedish Citizen Study includes a huge battery of questions on membership and activity in 30 different types of voluntary associations (see Appendix). They range from recreational organizations such as sports clubs and cultural societies, over organizations promoting particular interests, such as women’s or pensioners’ organizations and trade unions,
to organizations struggling for a more ideological cause, such as environmental and peace organizations. To probe for as much information on the organizational involvement of the respondents’ as possible, show cards with extensive exemplifications of each type was provided. For each membership reported, respondents were in addition asked whether they held office or during the past year had been active in the organization. The average Swedish citizen in 1997 reported membership in 3.0 types of organizations, activity in 0.89 and holding office in 0.5 (Petersson et al. 1998, 64f). Since holding office almost per definition implies being active, we shall in what follows combine these two measures into one representing either holding office or being active; in this sense the average Swede is ”active” in 0.9 types of organizations. In addition, we shall be using a pooled index of both membership and activity levels. This will allow us to both consider the joint impact of membership and activity and to separate the effects of these different forms of organizational involvement. All variables are again ranged from 0 to 100.

We must now also take possibly confounding background variables into consideration. There are good reasons to expect that membership and activity in voluntary associations is in part rooted in the same socioeconomic status differences as political participation itself. We shall therefore include a set of controls for socioeconomic position in the analyses to follow. These controls, selected through a series of regressions (results not shown), are all significant determinants of political participation. They include sex, age, years of education, occupational level (worker, civil servant or self-employed/farmer), sector of employment (public vs. private), residence (living in a town or city vs. in the countryside) and immigration. In order to direct attention to the information of most importance for the research question at hand, this control model will not presented explicitly in the tables to come.

As table 5 makes clear, there is a substantive effect from being involved in voluntary associations on political participation, regardless of social position, a fact that now should come as a no surprise. The impact is more sizeable on contacting than on manifestations, however. The reason for this is made clear from the second model of each dependent variable. When membership and activity are separated, we can observe first of all that being active has a larger effect than merely holding membership; neither this should come as a surprise. The magnitude of this difference varies across the two modes of political participation, however. Members of voluntary associations initiate more contacts to approximately the same extent as

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9 Other control variables tested in the selection process but rejected due to statistical insignificance were civil status, income, residential ownership, access to free time, unemployment, health status, citizenship and language skills.

10 To avoid loosing all respondent who have never been gainfully employed, and therefore have no occupational level, and those who are non-employees and therefore have no sector of employment, these two categories are represented by dummies. The control models in themselves explain 11.9 % of the variance in contacting, and 4.5 % of the variance in manifestations. The latter mode of participation is thus to a lesser extent structured by social stratification. In terms of the statistical significance of the controls included, however, the only difference between the two is that living in the countryside has a significant impact on contacting, but not on manifestations.
they join manifestations more than non-members. But being active has a more sizeable effect on contacting than on manifestations. For this reason voluntary associations exert greater influence on the former mode of participation than on the latter.

[Table 5 about here]

Two caveats need be commented upon with regard to the results in table 5. First of all, even though socioeconomic status is controlled for, there might be other confounding variables. In particular psychological engagement, such as the level of interest in politics and public affairs, might stimulate both organizational involvement and political participation. If such factors are not included in the model, then what appears as causal might in fact be spurious. It turns out the results (not shown) are fairly robust to the addition of such controls, however.11

The second problem concerns the possibility of endogeneity in the organizational variables. Much as being involved in voluntary associations may promote political activity, the causal arrow might run in the opposite direction: political participation might beget membership and activity in organizations. If we want to avoid making strong assumptions on loose empirical grounds, and employ opaque techniques such as “2SLS,” the only way of getting a reliable answer to that question is to gather data on the same individuals over time. As it happens, the Swedish Citizen Study was complemented in 1999 with a short mail questionnaire sent out to the same sample as in 1997.12 This questionnaire contained, among other things, a replication of both the items on political participation and organizational involvement. Although the findings (not shown) from this survey panel should as yet be treated as preliminary, they clearly suggest the causal arrow runs in the direction from involvement in voluntary association to participation rather than the other way round.13 Thus, we can proceed with some empirically founded confidence in the exogeneity of our explanatory variable here.

Now why do we observe this effect? Why are people equipped with social resources in the form of organizational memberships and activity more politically active than others? One possible answer is that the effect running from organizational involvement to participation follows the pathway through recruitment. This hypothesis is tested in table 6. What the figures represent is the extent (in percentages) to which the effects shown in table 5 decrease when we control for the recruitment variables. Thus, the first row in the first column indicate that 28.4

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11 The survey includes two general measures of psychological engagement: interest in politics and the “entertainment value” of both passively following and becoming involved in politics and public affairs.
12 The response rate was 61.9 percent. If only counting the individuals who took part in both waves, however, the response rate was 52.7 percent.
13 I have simply run a cross-lagged model for each of the dependent variables. In the case of manifestations, the effect of participation in 1997 on organizational involvement in 1999 is not even significant when controlling for organizational involvement in 1997. Although this coefficient reaches statistical significance in the case of contacting, the corresponding cross-lagged effect of organizational involvement in 1997 on contacts in 1999 is substantially more sizeable.
percent of the effect on contacting from the index combining membership and activity operates through the mechanism of recruitment. The corresponding figure for manifestations is 36.3 percent. Thus, although the overall effect of organizational involvement on contacting is larger than that on manifestations, the latter is more explicable in terms of recruitment. When separating the effects it turns out organizational activity runs through recruitment to a larger extent than mere membership does. To be precise, 38.4 percent of the effect of being active on contacting, and 43.8 percent of the effect on manifestations, run through recruitment. In other words, the activists of organizational life become more active in political life to a large part because they assent to more solicitations for participation.

[Table 6 about here]

Are all sources of requests equally responsible for this causal mechanism? This is the question the lower parts of table 6 attempt to answer. This time we have three or four recruitment variables to control for, so things become a little more complicated. What the figures for each source of recruitment now represent is the extent (in percentages) to which the effects of organizational involvement decrease when this particular recruitment variable is added to the others. Since the recruitment variables are not perfectly independent, this creates some overlap with the consequence that percentages do not sum neatly to the total effects presented in the first row. In a relative sense, however, they still give a clear picture of the importance of each source of recruitment as a mediating mechanism.

As simple logic would lead one to expect, some of the impact of organizational involvement on political action is due to the fact that organizations are themselves the locus of recruitment. Especially in the case of organizational activists, an important explanation for their wider participation is the fact that they are requested to act by fellow members. To play an active role in an organization is to expose oneself to inputs from the organizational environment that trigger political involvement. Perhaps somewhat surprisingly, however, a mechanism of equal importance in play is the requests by persons known from other contexts than organizational life. The recruitment from family, friends, colleagues and neighbors picks up at least as much, in some cases more, of the effects of organizational involvement on participation (be it contacting or manifestations). When seen from the perspective of those recruiting for political action, however, this result becomes more understandable. Just as political leaders are "more likely to mobilize the people whose actions are most effective at producing political outcomes" (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, 31), ordinary citizens would be expected to gather the people around a specific political action that are best suited to aid the cause. That is, they would be more likely to ask people who in terms of prestige, influence and experience would make a substantial contribution to the effectiveness of the action. Members and activists in voluntary associations probably fit this description in the eyes of their
associates, regardless of whether the latter themselves are involved in the same organizations, or in any organization at all. Thus, there is a rationale behind the finding that recruitment from other contexts than organizational life is an important mechanism translating organizational involvement into political participation.

Of the two more general sources of recruitment, the mechanism of ”social recruitment” outnumbers ”political mobilization” in importance. This is especially so in the case of contacting, where recruitment from strangers only plays a minor role as mediator between organizational involvement and political action. When it comes to manifestations, ”political mobilization” is a more sizeable part of the mechanism, while still less important than ”social recruitment”. When we separate between recruitment from strangers in organization and those from other contexts, as we are able to in this case, we can also observe that the former is more substantial than the latter.

In sum, these results enable us to speak of at least three different ways in which voluntary associations are important for the amount of political participation in a society. First of all, organizations provide arenas where political activity is encouraged through mutual recruitment among fellow members. Second, members of organizations, being regarded as more prestigious and influential than others, are solicited into action by their social environment, regardless of whether these associates are in themselves a part of organizational life. Third, people joining voluntary associations are targeted by corporate actors of the political system and mobilized into political action.

**Types of Organizations?**

[This section is as yet unwritten.]

[Table 7 about here? Effects of different types of voluntary associations (OLS regression)]

**Informal Networks: Personal Discussion and Practical Assistance**

Thus far we have only been concerned with social resources in the form of formal networks. We now turn to the question of informal networks, i.e. social ties not necessarily structured by the existence of a formal organization. Any measurement of social networks of this sort must first of all struggle with the choice of relational content (Burt 1983a). People have friends and acquaintances, they have bonds of kinship, colleagues at work and neighbors next door. But they also have ties to persons not so easily defined, more infrequent in nature and less stable over time. There is no obvious way to generate a comprehensive picture of all ties linking an individual to his or her social environment. One must therefore probe for networks of a specific relational content. The more types of contents covered in a survey questionnaire, the more general the picture of course. Since interview time is a scarce resource, however, some contents must be preferred over others. In the Swedish Citizen Study, we asked questions
about social networks of three different kinds, two relating to verbal communication and one to the access to "practical assistance" of different sorts. Some basic characteristics of these ego-networks surrounding each respondent is reported in table 8.

The first type of network measure was generated through the quite common question about the frequency with which a respondent "talks about public affairs with other people". The response categories given were "almost every day", "a few times a week", "a few times a month", "a few times a year" and "never or almost never". In addition, however, we probed respondents who reported discussing politics at least a few times a year for the number of persons with whom they are usually having such discussions. This gives a separate measure of the size of the political discussion network. Moreover, in order to gauge the density of the network, we asked the same set of respondents to what extent the people with whom they discuss politics "know each other".

[Table 8 about here]

A separate network generator was applied through the introductory question: "As you know, people sometimes need help with various matters. Do you have any personal acquaintance or person close to you from whom you could easily get help with the following." This was followed by a list of items describing different things one could need help with, the answer to which could be yes or no. One of the things listed were "discussing intimate matters". Respondents reporting access to such networks were again probed for the number of alters with whom they sometimes discuss intimate matters, and the extent to which these people know each other. The rest of the list included the following: "Construction or handyman help", "Getting products on better terms than in ordinary stores", "Arranging a large party", "Medical", "Economical", "Legal" and "Computer expertise". The total number of such things to which the respondent has easy access is summarized as the scope of such practical assistance networks. Once again, the size and density of these networks were probed for.

For ease of interpretation, the frequency, scope and density measures in table 8 are ranged from 0 to 100.\textsuperscript{14} The size measures, lacking a theoretical maximum, are kept in absolute figures. Political discussions turn out to be a commonly practiced habit among Swedes. The mean value of 75,3 implies that the average citizen talks about public affairs about a few times a week. An absolute majority, 85,2 percent, also report having someone with whom to discuss more intimate matters, and of the different forms of practical assistance the average citizen

\textsuperscript{14} For persons reporting no network the size measure was set to 0. Density is in this case an undefined property, however. A more intricate question is how to define the density of a network consisting of only one person. Theoretically speaking, density should probably be considered an undefined property in this situation as well (see, for example, Marsden 1987, 124 n. 4), since there are no "relations among alters" present. To avoid loosing too many cases, however, I have assigned the maximum density value of 100 to respondents reporting only one alter. After all, what could be more dense than a network consisting of only one person?
has access to slightly more than 50 percent. The size and density varies across the different types of networks in a fairly predictable manner. The smallest and most tightly knit networks are those where people discuss intimate matters. On average respondents report having only 2.9 alters with whom to communicate about such things. On the other end of scale, political discussion networks are larger and less densely structured. The average size of these networks is 10.4 persons, but this conceals a highly skewed distribution, with half of the sample having networks of sizes smaller than six while some talkative individuals report to have dozens of people with whom they discuss politics. Somewhere in between we have the practical assistance networks. This make sense since they are composed of family, friends and acquaintances while at the same time with a relational content of less intimate nature.

As these comparisons suggest, network size and density are inversely related: the smaller the size, the greater the density. Correlational analysis (not shown) also reveal that the scope of practical assistance networks and the frequency of political discussion are positively related to size.

Before moving to this causal analysis, we again need to consider what controls need be applied. The social background characteristics should definitely be included. Other studies have shown that socioeconomic status and social resources in the form of informal networks go together (Campbell et al. 1986), and Sweden is no exception to this rule. More problematic in nature, however, is the case of organizational involvement. By simply looking at bivariate correlations (not shown), it is quite clear that formal and informal networks are associated. Both membership and activity in voluntary associations are positively related to the frequency of political discussion and the scope of practical assistance networks. For all three types of networks, there is also a positive association with size, and a negative with density. Organizational involvement thus qualifies as a possible confounding variable in a model linking informal networks to political participation. What remains, however, is an issue about the direction of causality operating between these formal and informal networks. Do voluntary associations affect informal networks or is the situation the reverse? Here again the panel component of our study comes in handy. Since the informal networks were only measured in the first wave, this time we can only assess one side of this coin: the extent to which informal networks are exogenous to organizational involvement. The results (not shown) again appear to be fairly clear cut. With a dynamic specification, informal networks appear to exert no significant influence on involvement in formal organizations. We can then infer with some confidence that the correlations between the two are produced by causation in the opposite direction, from formal to informal networks. We thus insert the former as a control in the equation linking informal networks to political participation.

The results are shown in table 9. Since the internal relationships among the network measures form a complicated nexus of both conceptual overlaps and possible causation, we proceed in a stepwise manner. First, the dependent variables are regressed on the measures of
our three network types taken separately, leaving out density (models C9.1-3 and M9.1-3). With all size measures being heavily skewed towards the lower end of the scale, they are here substituted by their natural logarithms. Increasing size is thus expected to exert a decreasing marginal impact on political participation (this functional form was corroborated in precursory analyses). In terms of networks of intimate discussion, size reaches both substantial and statistical significance in the model for both dependent variables. This is not the case with regard to the networks of practical assistance, however, where scope clearly surpasses size as a predictor of both contacting and manifestations. If size would determine scope, this could of course still be interpreted as an indirect relationship (before controlling for scope, the size of practical assistance networks has a sizeable effect on participation). But I would rather interpret size as being a function of scope, i.e., the more a person has access to practical assistance in different areas of life, the more people is contained in his or her practical assistance network. Thus, we can in this case infer that size is a spurious predictor of participation.

[Table 9 about here]

The patterns in the case of political discussion networks are a bit more complicated. When controlling for frequency, size has an impact on contacting but not on manifestations. When controlling for size, by contrast, frequency is a significant predictor of manifestations but not of contacting. I have no clear theoretical idea about why this should be the case. Frequency could be interpreted as a measure of the intensity of network interaction, while size, as I argued in the theoretical section above, is an important aspect of network range. For some reason, then, network intensity is a more important generator of political manifestations, while range is a more notable elicitor of contacts. Since we cannot be sure whether frequency drives or is driven by size, we will simply have to accept these results in the models to follow.

In the next step we assess the impact of density relative to other network characteristics, still applying separate equations for separate types of networks (models C9.4-6 and M9.4-6). The results are quite striking. When controlling for size as well as frequency or scope, network density has no direct impact on political participation. As in the case of size relative to scope, I again would argue there is no indirect relationship either. Density is best understood as being endogenous to size. True, one could argue there is a logical relationship between the two. In two networks of unequal size, the fact that the smaller is more dense than the larger one could simply reflect the fact that the probability of finding links between alters decreases in proportion to the number of alters. I think there is a substantial reason for this decreasing function, however. If we accept that social agents operate under time constraints, there is an upper limit to the number of associates they can bring together and introduce to each other. When this upper limit is reached, one can make new acquaintances but without
being able to produce mutual connections in between them (cf. Scott 2000, 74f). For this reason, size is a determinant of density. Thus, we can safely proceed by leaving our density measures outside the model.

The final step in our assessment of the informal network variables is to compare them across network types (models C9.7 and M9.7). When all size measures as well as the frequency of political discussion and the scope of practical assistance is included in the equation, one thing of substantial importance occurs: the networks of intimate discussion loses significance. As these results have it, participation is not a significant byproduct of discussions on intimate matters among associates and kin. When the purpose of social ties is to discuss politics or to get access to practical assistance, on the other hand, political behavior is affected. That is, content matters. In order to promote political participation the mere existence of a social network is not enough. The relational contents must in addition be of a certain type.

The other network characteristics display effects similar to when network types where assessed individually. Thus the size of ego’s political discussion network, and the scope of his practical assistance network, has a significant impact on contacting, while frequency of political discussion together with scope are the determinants of manifestations. As in the case of organizational involvement, psychological engagement could be the underlying cause of both social networks (especially discussing politics) and participation. But the results presented in table 9 are robust to such controls (not shown). Finally, we again must consider the possibility of a reversed direction of causality. Political participation brings people together, sometimes creating social bonds connecting persons who would otherwise be strangers to each other. To the extent this is the case, participation would not be an effect of social networks but rather their cause (Miller 1998, 10). Results from our panel (not shown) lend support to the direction of causality posited in table 9, however.

The extent to which the significant effects of informal networks on political participation follows the pathway through recruitment is presented in table 10. Entries are calculated according to the same logic as in table 6. Is the recruitment process a mechanism in operation here? The answer is yes, but to a lesser extent than in the case of formal organizations. Some 10 percent of the effect of political discussion networks run through recruitment. The mechanism through which the scope of practical assistance networks operate differs between the two dependent variables. As regards contacting, 23.6 percent of the effect runs through recruitment. In the case of manifestations, the corresponding figure is only 7.7 percent. In comparison to the patterns in table 6, these results overall indicate that recruitment is not as important a mechanism converting social ties into political participation.

[Table 10 about here]
This makes the break downs into recruitment sources in the lower part of table 10 somewhat less interesting. Since we have no information on whether the social networks considered are composed of people known from organizational life or from some other context, these figures are in addition more difficult to interpret. By and large, however, the story told again is that "social recruitment" is a stronger mechanism than "political mobilization". People with large networks, or networks they frequently interact with, are more politically engaged in part because they are prompted to act by their associates and willingly to assent to such appeals. They do receive requests for participation from actors outside their networks as well. This makes perfectly sense, since they on average have more associates who could give their name and number to an unknown requester. But in comparison such solicitations from strangers play a minor role in converting informal social recourses into political action.

**The Full Model: Networks, Recruitment and Political Participation**

Thus far, we have been disentangling the different parts of the structural model presented in figure 1. It is now time to take stock by putting the parts together again, and assess the full model posited. Table 11 presents the findings from such a model, with our measures of recruitment, formal and informal networks all included in the equation. The patterns should be familiar by now. Recruitment has a substantive and sizeable effect on both modes of political participation, regardless of formal and informal networks as well as socioeconomic status. Among the characteristics of informal networks, a marginal increase the in number of persons with whom one discusses politics, and the scope of one’s practical assistance networks, figure as significant determinants of contacting, even when controlling for organizational involvement. In the case of manifestations, what matters apart from scope is the frequency of political discussions. Finally, the two models for each dependent variables separate the results of including the pooled measure of organizational involvement from the ones distinguishing between membership and activity. Although memberships have a substantive direct impact on both contacting and manifestations, being active in a voluntary association is conducive to the former but not the latter after having taken the pathways through recruitment and informal networks in to account. Considered jointly, however, formal networks have direct effects on both modes of participation.

[Table 11 about here]

A final question regarding the causal mechanisms linking social resources to participation can now be answered: the extent to which the pathway of voluntary associations runs through informal networks. The joint effect of membership and activity on contacting decreases by
another 15.1 percentage points when controlling for the entire set of informal network characteristics. This could be compared to the 28.4 percent running through recruitment (see table 6). With regard to manifestations, the informal network mechanism is more on par with the recruitment pathway, explaining an additional 29.3 percent of the effect of organizational involvement, as compared to the 36.3 percent already picked up by recruitment. By and large, then, the mechanism operating within the two subsets of social resources is of less importance than the pathway through recruitment.

When comparing the explained variance across the two modes of participation, it is quite clear that the propensity to contact is structured by social resources to a larger extent than the inclination to join manifestations. This has been a consistent pattern throughout the paper. The reason for this, one might argue, could be the socioeconomic controls not shown in the table. But this is not the case. The entire set of controls for social position adds less than a percentage point to the explained variance of both contacting and manifestations, after taking social resources and recruitment into consideration. In terms of statistical significance, only gender exert a direct influence on both modes of participation when controlling for the remaining parts of the model. In the case of contacting, being working class, employed in the public sector and living in the countryside also reach the levels of statistical significance employed. However, this says something only about the ability to predict participation from socioeconomic as compared to social resources. Since social background characteristic are likely to be exogenous to social resources, in a causal sense I would rather interpret this finding as another mechanism in play, this time linking SES to participation.

*The insignificance of social trust*

[This section is as yet unwritten.]

**Concluding Remarks**

Following the conjectures summoned in the section on social capital theory, I have devoted this paper to provide results supported by empirical evidence. As is generally the case, though, answers beget new questions. By way of conclusion, I shall therefore in addition to a summary of the results try to outline what major problems I think remain unsolved in my findings.

To begin with, recruitment is an important source of political participation. The results in this case are clear and consistent across both modes of participation considered. As an explanation to why some people are more prone to take political action than others, however, recruitment might seem as somewhat unsatisfactory. In particular, we cannot exclude the possibility that recruitment is partly endogenous to participation. Since “those who are politically active develop networks of acquaintance that lead to additional requests” (Verba et al. 1995, 158), this could certainly be the case for ”social recruitment”. To the extent
that "politicians and activists are more likely to mobilize people who are likely to respond by participating" (Rosenstone & Hansen 1993, 31), this might apply for "political mobilization" as well. Hence, being able to separate the chains of causation running in each direction would be of substantial interest for future work in this field.

My findings concerning membership and activity in formal groups in large parts confirm patterns discovered in other countries. The fact that recruitment processes are an important mechanism explaining the effects from voluntary associations on participation is more of a new contribution to the field. Having said this, however, as table 11 makes clear there still are remainders left unexplained. This especially concerns the effect of being merely a member in a formal organization. When referring to being active, more of the impact can be explained in terms of recruitment than in the case of only holding membership. Moreover, the logic of other mechanisms suggested in the literature, such as the importance of "civic skills" (Verba et al. 1995), applies more in the case of activists than just members. Hence, we need to know more about what it is about these "affiliations on paper", which some people report in greater numbers than others, that contribute to political activity.

An intensified search for more elaborated mechanisms is basically what I would suggest in the case of informal networks as well. According to my findings, these networks are important sources of political participation, independent of formal organizational involvement. But again they leave important issues unresolved. I have already commented on the different effects of discussing politics frequently as opposed to having a large political discussion network, a discrepancy I haven’t been able to find a theoretical rationale for. Apart from this, however, the question remains what mechanisms other than recruitment account for the impact of informal networks on participation.

Let me end by giving some sketchy thoughts on this last issue, although I have as yet no clear argument developed. The Granovetter argument is cast in terms of information potential, which when applied to participation I have interpreted as a higher propensity of being asked to join. But of course the information that flows through a network could be relevant for political participation in other ways than as a conveyor of requests. It could for example make people more aware of problems and issues of concern to them that would have otherwise have gone unnoticed. This could be another way in which informal ties, especially when they contain verbal communication on public affairs, are conducive to political action. As regards the other coin of the recruitment process, the propensity to accept requests when reached by them, one might conjecture that an entirely different phenomena than that suggested by Granovetter might be in operation. In Coleman’s writings on social capital, "weak ties" figure less prominently than the idea of "closure" (Coleman 1990, 318-20). The basic idea here is that when two persons are trying to control the behavior of a third, they stand greater chances of success if they know each other, i.e., to the extent that there is "closure" in the system of relations connecting the three. When translated to the case of recruitment for participation,
this could be interpreted as an hypothesis concerning the likelihood of responding positively to a request: people with dense networks are more prone to assent to solicitations for participation since the actors in their networks can better coordinate their persuasion attempts. According to this argument, then, “strong ties” would actually be more important than “weak” ones, but only in the second stage of the recruitment process. To test this hypothesis, then, one would have to model the process of transmitting requests separately from the responses to requests, a path that could yield interesting results if pursued in the future.

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