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Collective Political Action as Civic Voluntarism:

*Analysing Ethnic Associations as Political
Participants by Translating Individual Level
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ABSTRACT

This paper presents and empirically evaluates an analytical experiment, in which individual level explanations of differences in political participation are translated to an organizational level. Utilizing the ‘Civic Voluntarism Model’ of participation research, we analyse consequences of voluntary associations’ potentially politically valuable ‘resources’, ‘motivation’ and ‘recruitment networks’. We use unique data from a survey of ethnic associations in Stockholm, Sweden—which may be considered as particularly interesting since in Swedish integration policy such associations are expected to fulfil a formal political role. Estimating a series of regression models, our results suggest that the overall logic of how associational level political participation is encouraged resembles corresponding mechanisms on the individual level. We find that quite basic resources, such as the number of members in a given association, promote participation; also when motivation, as reflected in assessed importance of political influence, is accounted for. Similarly, the results confirm that access to political networks stimulates political participation among voluntary associations. We conclude that both our theoretical argument and empirical findings merit further analyses of ethnic associations as well as other collective actors' political participation in accordance with the approach taken in this study.

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This paper presents and empirically evaluates an analytical experiment, in which we seek to translate individual level explanations of differences in political participation to an organizational level. To this end, we make use of rarely obtainable primary data on reports of political activities performed by a sample of voluntary associations. The simple but, we contend, fertile idea is that associations may be treated as units of analysis in the same manner as individuals conventionally are treated in analyses of political participation. By utilizing a unified theoretical model, we believe that our framework adds to existing theories about the diverse political roles of associations (e.g. Knoke 1990; Warren 2001; Maloney and Roßteutscher, eds 2007). Ultimately, we expect that approaches of this kind may be useful as bridges between studies of civil society politics on one hand, and of political participation among ordinary citizens on the other, not least in view of contemporary challenges in the increasingly multiethnic democracies of Europe (cf. Uitermark, Rossi and van Houtum 2005).

Specifically, we explore to what extent organizational level characteristics may reasonably correspond to individual level explanatory factors suggested by the well-established and influential *Civic Voluntarism Model* (CVM) in political participation research (Verba, Schlozman and Brady 1995, hereafter VSB 1995; see also Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995).

Traditionally, scholars investigating civil society relations within the political participation research field tend to focus on the role of voluntary associations in encouraging and improving individual members' political engagement and efficacy in political life. For example, associational life has been assigned an important role both in democratic theory, where organizations are seen as schools in civic competence (Mill 1991[1861]; Pateman 1970), and theories about social capital, where they are understood as important nodes in members' networks, as well as a source of interpersonal trust that can be transferred to other societal contexts (Putnam 1993, 2000). In this type of theories, organizations—even if strictly non-political—are seen as *arenas* where activists can strengthen their motivation and capability to take part in politics in general (cf. Almond and Verba 1963; Teorell 2003; Kwak, Shah and Holbert 2004). This type of analysis typically focuses on *unintended* democratic *side effects* of what associations do within their substantial mission.¹

Indeed, a quite analogous 'arena perspective' is present in the CVM, given this model's focus (further elucidated in the following sections) on politically valuable *resources*, political *motivation* and networks of political *recruitment* (VSB 1995). Still, individually oriented analyses do not tell us much about political participation on the collective level—activities, that is, performed by associations *as actors*, rather than acts performed by individual members.

In contrast, collective level participation is regularly the analytical point of departure in research concerned with political orientations and implications of social movements

(e.g. Tarrow 1994; McAdam and Scott 2005). Focusing on how various structural conditions may affect prospects of, for example, protest movements, the natural outcome variable is the collective level political activity performed by relevant (more or less informally organized) movements. Research within this tradition has thus offered much insight into the diverse sets of instruments of political influence, or collective action ‘repertoires’ (Tarrow 1994), that organisational level actors may develop and take advantage of.

Likewise, in research traditions focusing on explicit political organizations such as political parties or trade unions, the specific interest group is clearly the ‘active subject’, regarded as having formulated its political claims, and hence pursuing strategies to gain votes, sympathies and power (e.g. Schmitter 1974 on corporatism, and Linz and Stepan 1996 on civil society state relations). Hence, considering voluntary associations as potential political actors is arguably established practice in several social science research fields.

From a more meta-theoretical viewpoint, one may also keep in mind that rationalistic directions within the economics, sociology, political science, and not least international relations, consistently analyse collectives of various size and stability as actors, with more or less rational intentions—for example households, firms, governments, and international unions of states. As Kaidesoja (2013: 312) points out: ‘[S]ocially coordinated and institutionalized actions of individual actors as well as actions of organized social groups (e.g. social movements and formal organizations) [...] are typically among the core explanatory factors in the explanations of large-scale macro-social changes’. Again, from such a vantage point, considering voluntary associations as actors is not very far-fetched. Indeed, one may even argue that such ‘actors’ in general are more coherent in terms of interests, preferences and goals than many other politically relevant collectives.²

While bearing this in mind, we focus on associations as potential political actors by employing a unified theoretical model. Specifically, we explore conditions for associational level political participation through an attempt to analytically convert the CVM to an organizational level. Our aim is hence to utilize information on the kind of resources, motivation and recruitment networks that voluntary associations may possess, and probe the extent to which such factors may influence their collectively organised political participation.

The primary data we use—observations from a sample of ethnic associations in Stockholm, Sweden—provide, we contend, quite reasonable measures of associational level resources, engagement and recruitment networks, hence making the analytical experiment fruitful. Indeed, we argue that ethnic associations in Sweden represent a particularly useful case for analyses of the kind conducted in this paper. On one hand they are not by definition political, which helps us avoid tautological relationships—as

we would face in a study of for instance political parties. On the other hand, however, there are some aspects of their ‘political opportunity structure’ (e.g. Tilly 1978; Tarrow 1994; cf. Bengtsson 2010) that may provide incentives for political activities. Swedish integration policy has long been directed towards immigrants’ organizational life (Strömblad, Myrberg and Bengtsson 2011). Ethnic associations have been granted state support since the mid-1970s, and considerable institutional and economic incentives have been addressed to this part of the civil society. Membership is higher than in comparable countries, and associations of this kind are often assigned a formal role in politics. With inspiration from the ‘popular movement’ idea, ethnic associations are habitually expected to function both as platforms for political action and as beneficial environments for the development of their members’ political competence and efficacy (Bengtsson 2010). This dual function of serving as a focal point for leisure activities and simultaneously as a venue for democratic engagement would lead us to expect larger variation in terms of associational level political participation, than if we would have studied a sample of for example well-established Swedish sports clubs.

In the remainder of the paper, we first proceed by elaborating our theoretical framework, including our re-conceptualisation of the CVM. Next, we provide information on the data collection procedures and the sample of associations on which the analyses are based. In the section following, we present empirical results; and in the final section we conclude our findings and discuss the fruitfulness of our approach.

Introducing the toolbox of the CVM

If voluntary associations are regarded as actors that, in principle, could choose to take political action in one way or the other, may this be studied by using a theoretical toolbox designed for individual actors? Considering the CVM as such a toolbox, we find the prospects in this regard to be promising.

According to the original version of the model, the political participation of ordinary citizens is primarily influenced by three overarching factors: In a nutshell, those who have resources that facilitate participation, and those who are psychologically motivated to participate are expected to be more involved in political life; further, citizens are expected to participate more frequently if they have access to political recruitment networks, in which mobilization takes place through explicit requests for political action (VSB 1995: Ch. 9; Brady, Schlozman and Verba 1999).

As further elaborated below, the *resources* considered valuable for political participants are time, money and civic skills. In terms of individual level *motivation*, the CVM focuses on variations in terms of political interest, political efficacy, political information and strength of party identification (components which are also further discussed below in relation to operationalizations). The last among the three overarching factors of the CVM, *recruitment*, acknowledges the importance of active

mobilization of fellow citizens. The role of similar factors in producing organizational political participation has certainly been discussed in other research traditions. Thus the role of resources has been extensively discussed in work based on resource mobilization theory (e.g. McCarthy and Zald 1977; Jenkins 1983). Motivational factors have been analysed in terms of goals, interests and ideology by scholars interested in social movement and civil society organizations (e.g. Knoke 1982; Leliveldt and Caiani 2007). And recruitment is an important aspect in the study of interorganizational networks (e.g. Diani and McAdam 2003).

We see, however, three potential benefits with applying the CVM to issues of association level participation. First, this perspective focuses on issues of participation from the potential participants' viewpoint, and may thus complement other approaches that highlight institutional prerequisites. Second, the CVM integrates resources, motivation and recruitment in one coherent theoretical framework, which, almost tautologically, allows the inclusive analysis of all types of drivers behind participation. Third, if applied to the associational level, CVM allows the analysis of the individual and collective levels in the same theoretical terms, which makes possible comparison between organizational and individual member activity, as well as two-level analysis of relations between the two levels.

In sum, the essential message of the CVM is thus that politically passive citizens lack necessary political resources, political motivation, and access to recruitment networks. Intuitively, this seems reasonable, and empirical evidence certainly confirms the intuition of the model (cf. VSB 1995: Ch. 12–13). Now, in the analyses following, we seek to translate the CVM to the organizational level, thus trying to explore reasonably specified organisational 'counterparts' of individual resources, motivation and recruitment networks—and their possible effects on the political participation of voluntary associations.

Utilising the intuitively appealing logic of the CVM, and paraphrasing VSB 1995 (p. 269), one may assume that associations refrain from political involvement if they 'can't act as political collectives' or if they 'don't want to act as political collectives'. Hence, all else being equal, we hypothesise that associations better endowed with resources facilitating participation are more energetic political actors, and that the same is true for associations regarding political influence as an important part of their overall mission. Furthermore, one may expect political recruitment networks to be important also on the organizational level. Much like individuals, associations may receive requests for political participation that stimulate activity; they may for example be invited to take part in demonstrations.

In the next section, after having described our empirical data, we specify a detailed set of indicators based on the above reasoning, and examine their relations to associational level political participation.

Locating voluntary association data

To our knowledge, data describing voluntary associations as potential political actors are highly uncommon. However, an available data set originating from a previous study on ethnic associations in Sweden, proved to have attractive features for our purposes. Specifically, the data are based on a survey of associations in greater Stockholm, organising people of Chilean, Turkish, Kurdish or Syrian Christian background.

Since considerable numbers of immigrants representing these groups have resided in Sweden for more than three decades, one may assume that they have had the time and opportunity to create an associational life of some political importance. Even so, given the mentioned time span, we do not expect them to have reached such a degree of assimilation that their ethnically based associations have completely lost their political relevance and turned into mere transmitters of tradition. Hence, these associations are expected to maintain the previously mentioned dual functions, which at least to some extent would promote political participation (while simultaneously leave room for variation). This makes them clearly interesting for our analysis.

In line with these assumptions, the survey—administered as interviews with leading representatives of each association—included a series of questions on political activities as well as on political resources, motivation and networks, which we take advantage of in the analyses below.³

Explaining associational level political participation

To explore the fruitfulness of applying the CVM on voluntary associations, we must be able to discern political activities performed by such collectives. Unlike citizens, associations do not vote in general elections, but they may still act in several other ways to influence political processes and strive for changes in society. The survey tried to capture a number of such possibilities through a series of questions on organizational activism. Respondents were asked to report how frequently their respective associations have performed different activities (‘during the last 12 months’) by using the response options ‘never’, ‘1–3 times’, ‘4–6 times’, or ‘7 times or more’.⁴

Table 1 displays a list of the specific activities thus recorded, with relative frequencies of each mode of participation. Specifically, the figures display the percentages of associations reporting that they have been active at least 1–3 times during the last 12 months. Based on the result from a dimensional analysis, we find that these political acts may be classified in two major categories, which we have labelled *proclaiming* and *protesting*.⁵ The former category embraces activities aiming at declaring an association’s point of view, assumingly with the intention to influence opinions in society. This may certainly be the aim of activities in the second category also, but the

common denominator of protest-oriented acts is that they are more expressive manifestations; involving participation ‘taken to the streets’, rather than ‘behind the desk’. Although this dichotomy may not be completely clear-cut for each conceivable act, the distinction has clear face validity. Furthermore, it appears to have empirical relevance; as we will show below, some organizational characteristics seem to affect the propensity to perform proclaiming political acts, while being unrelated to protest-oriented means of participation.

Table 1. Two dimensions of associational level political participation

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

The figures in table 1 reveal that a large majority of the studied associations (approximately three quarters) have sent letters to public authorities. Protesting by means of organising a boycott is, on the other hand, far less common; barely one in ten of the associations report that they have been politically active in this way. On the whole, yet a significantly larger share of the associations organise demonstrations, the proclivity for protest-oriented political participation generally seems to be lower.⁶

Using the summarized proclaiming and protesting types of activities as dependent variables in regression models, we now move on to a stepwise examination of how resources, motivation and recruitment networks affect associational level political participation. In so doing, the logic of our approach closely resembles the original individual level analysis of VSB 1995 (Ch. 12–13).

While our main empirical assignment is to clarify the extent to which the three overarching factors of the CVM each have independent effects, we present specifications step by step. By following this strategy we may scrutinise the importance of each set of variables more thoroughly.

The role of resources for associational level political participation

Recalling the three kinds of resources suggested by Verba, Schlozman and Brady as being valid on the individual level (time, money and civic skills), time is an obvious asset for political participants. Regardless of activity people who have lots of free time

should, all else being equal, be able to act politically more often than those who work double-time. For voluntary associations, however, one may consider the size of an association, as reflected in its number of members, as a parallel to the available time for a single citizen. We find it reasonable to assume that larger associations in general are politically more resourceful, simply because they would have more heads and hands available when scheduling potential activities.⁷

Money may seem less obvious as a valuable resource for political activity. But taking into account that financial contributions to political campaigns and the like should be regarded as political participation, it becomes clear that one must have at least some amount of money to take part (VSB 1995: 289–291). Indeed, associations may also make political donations, and collective arrangements may certainly be costly. Unfortunately, however, given our available data we are not able to efficiently study variations in associational level economic resources. . Although the survey did include a question on the yearly budget of the association, the information thus obtained seems less reliable; primarily due to high item non-response.⁸

Considering other possible counterparts to economic resources at the individual level, we suggest that having a dedicated space for activities may be important. We hypothesise that a ‘head-quarter’, where administrative work can be done and members might show up spontaneously, may promote political discussion and participation. Furthermore, we hypothesise that a well-developed technical infrastructure for administration would give associations a higher participatory potential, since coordination and distribution of information thus should require less efforts. From this viewpoint, we take into account variations among the associations in terms of access to information technology, such as fax machines, computers and internet connections.⁹

Further, following the resource identification of VSB 1995, political activity is also facilitated by ‘the communications and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and money effectively in political life’ (p. 304); that is, by the overall competence they refer to as civic skills. The basic intuition here is that citizens who are better skilled in this respect probably find it less complicated to participate politically, as their know-how comes handy for instance when chairing meetings, contacting policy makers, or coordinating campaign efforts. They will know where to direct their claims, and they will be able to communicate their preferences effectively. Civic skills should clearly be a resource of relevance, not just for individual citizens, but for collective entities as well. Acknowledging the intuitively appealing perspective that ‘organizations learn’ (e.g. Argyris and Schön 1978), there seems to be good reasons to expect analogous mechanisms on the associational level.

Still, operationalization may of course be a challenge also in this case. How should the level of ‘skills’, potentially utilisable in political activities, preferably be measured at the organizational level? Yet we are reluctant to give a clear-cut answer to this

question, we proceed much in the same way as VSB 1995 (Ch. 11), as they set out to find objective measures of citizens' civic skills (rather than relying on subjective assessments). In the original survey used by Verba, Schlozman and Brady, respondents were asked about experiences of exercising skills; gained, for instance, when organising a meeting or preparing a presentation at work (or, for that matter, in the role of being an active member of a voluntary association). In this study we try to apply a similar logic by considering the vitality of the internal democracy of the associations. We hypothesize that solid and respected democratic institutions, manifested by extensive member participation in internal decision-making ought to promote the political competence of the collective. If a greater proportion of the members are active in democratic practices, the association as such would assumingly retain a greater reserve of recyclable skills that facilitate political participation. In view of this, we include a measure on the proportion of members participating in general meetings of an association, in our collective version of the CVM.

Aside from the emphasis on potentially skills-producing activities, VSB 1995 (304–308) also take into account differences in formal education and in language proficiency. A variable describing education is conceivable only in terms of aggregate education level of members, and this was in any event not captured in the survey we use. The importance of language was, on the other hand, clearly acknowledged. As the surveyed associations chiefly organise members of foreign background, respondents were asked about the extent to which Swedish is used when various activities are performed. Following VSB 1995 (306–307), a good command of the primary language of the country of residence should be an important indicator of civic skills for our particular category of associations; furthermore, previous research suggests that this is a powerful predictor of the degree of political participation among immigrants in Sweden (Adman and Strömblad 2000: 36–42). Hence, including a measure of the usage of Swedish within the associations seems potentially rewarding as an indicator of members' ability to communicate effectively in Swedish.

Moving on to empirical scrutiny of the, hitherto, resource-based version of the CVM on the organizational level, we estimate two regression models for each of our previously defined indexes of political participation as dependent variables. The results are reported in table 2.

As shown in this table, we have separated the 'tangible resources' of size of association, space for activity and information technology, from the more 'intangible resources' of internal democracy and Swedish usage. Considering possible internal relationships, the variables in the first mentioned set may reasonably be regarded as causally prior to the variables in the other set. Accordingly, by a second-step inclusion of internal democracy and Swedish usage, their potential role as intervening variables may be revealed.

Table 2. Predicting associational level political participation by resources

Independent variables	Proclaiming activities				Protesting activities			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>
Tangible resources								
Size of association	.02	.06	.20***	.08	.05	.04	.14**	.06
Space for activities	.14	.14	.12	.13	.08	.09	.08	.10
Information technology	.28***	.10	.25***	.09	-.02	.07	-.03	.07
Intangible resources								
Internal democracy			1.08***	.31			.58**	.23
Swedish usage			-.003	.07			-.02	.05
(Constant)	.33	.28	-.95	.48	.05	.19	-.52	.36
<i>N</i> = 96	Adj. <i>R</i> ² .13		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .22		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .00		Adj. <i>R</i> ² .04	

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

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients (*B*), and standard errors (*SE B*). The dependent variables (*Proclaiming activities* and *Protesting activities*) are additive indexes based on the classification of items in Table 1, ranging from 0 (the association did not take part in any of the mentioned activities) to 3 (the association took part in all mentioned activities at least the maximum number of times specified in the survey). See Appendix for further details, and information about the independent variables.

Studying, first, the regression coefficients denoting the effects of the tangible resources, neither model 1 (with proclaiming as the dependent variable) nor model 3 (with protesting as the dependent variable) seems to support our organisational level CVM translation particularly well. Yet almost all coefficients have expected signs, the only statistically significant effect is the positive impact of information technology on proclaiming activities, which is certainly in accordance with theoretical expectations since the acts assembled under the proclaiming headline have communicative efforts in common. However, the other resource factors seem to be unrelated to associational level political participation.

As the results pertaining to models 2 and 4 in the table make clear, though, this conclusion does not hold when also the intangible resources are taken into account. Controlling for differences in internal democracy and Swedish usage, we find that associational size does seem to affect the propensity for political involvement after all; both in terms of proclaiming and protesting activities. Information technology still appears to be a significant predictor of proclaiming acts, while the possession of a dedicated space in itself does not seem to make any difference.

A series of complementary analyses (not shown) clarify the seemingly peculiar results in table 2. On closer inspection, we find that size has a *direct positive* effect on

political participation, but also an *indirect negative* effect through our measure of internal democracy. Consistent with expectations, the degree of internal democracy positively influences associational political participation. Associations in which larger share of the members convene at general meetings tend to raise their collective political voices more frequently in public. However, yet again as reasonably could be expected, such internal mobilization is harder to bring about in larger associations. Consequently, although the net effect of size on participation is nil on average, the results also tell us that for a given level of internal democracy associational size matters in the way we expected (and vice versa). Hence, the idea that the number of members in an association may be a parallel to the available time for a citizen is empirically supported. Important in this regard though, failing to take internal democracy in account would thus conceal the positive effect of size, because larger associations in general seem to provide less room for participative democracy. Hence, the result also suggests that smaller associations with a more vibrant internal democracy may serve better as ‘schools of democracy’ on the individual level (indirect effect), whereas on the collective level, large organisations may have more political influence (direct effect).

Further inspecting table 2, we note that associational level political participation—contrary to reasonable expectations—seems to be unrelated to the extent to which members of an ethnic association speak Swedish during activities.¹⁰ This result is interesting in the light of prior evidence of the importance of proficiency in the primary language of the host country for immigrants’ political participation, not just in Sweden but also in other European countries (Adman and Strömblad 2000: 39–40; Berger, Galonska and Koopmans 2004: 501–504; Jacobs, Phaet and Swyngedouw 2004: 551–554). Although language proficiency is a crucial resource for individuals, it may be that the political competence of ethnic associations does not depend on the language skills of the average member but on access to a few active members with high proficiency in Swedish. Moreover, our measure of Swedish usage may not really capture Swedish proficiency. Associations may well have reasons (cultural or purely practical) to conduct activities in members’ original language, regardless of their abilities to communicate in Swedish.

Motivation and recruitment networks for associational level political participation

Continuing on the route guided by the CVM map, we now make an effort to add collective level measures of motivation, as well as of recruitment networks, to the resource factors that we found to be influential. According to the intuitively plausible message of the theoretical model, political resources are necessary but not sufficient for political participation. In absence of at least some motivation to influence political decisions, no political activity is to be expected.

Following the specification of political motivation in VSB 1995 (345–348), one would expect that a person with a *political interest*, someone who enjoys following public debates and discussing political parties, would have a shorter route also to personally taking active part in political life. Similarly, a citizen with a high *political efficacy* believes that it is possible to have a say in politics, thus making political participation worthwhile. Further, whereas political efficacy has to do with ‘subjective competence’ (cf. Almond and Verba 1963), the CVM also incorporates a component focusing more on actual knowledge, referred to as *political information*. Although less obviously classified as a motivational aspect (cf. VSB 1995: 347), it is not a far-fetched idea that being generally informed about the workings and features of political systems tends to encourage political activity. Fourthly and finally, the CVM takes into account the *strength of party identification*. Citizens who feel attached to a political party are expected to be more active political participants than those who are indifferent in this regard.

Taken as a whole, we contend that a similar logic regarding political motivation is fully conceivable also on the collective level. Without any shared aspiration to influence society an association would hardly direct its efforts towards political participation.

Still, while adhering to the CVM model in general terms, we do not coin literal translations of all its components of political motivation. Particularly, we regard party identification as a less interesting CVM variable at the organizational level, while this rather would translate into a question of to what extent associations, effectively, are political parties. Moreover, the survey also suggested that the type of associations studied are rarely oriented towards party politics.

As for the other three originally suggested components of political motivation, organizational level equivalents are at least theoretically conceivable. At the same time, however, it is far from obvious how abstract traits like an association’s interest in politics, or its beliefs regarding the worthwhileness of political action, should be captured empirically. Possibly, ‘associational level political efficacy’ could be captured by means of appropriate survey questions to organizational representatives, and this may certainly be a fruitful assignment in future research.¹¹

In absence of such information we examine what may be called the political mission of a given association. By this we have in mind the extent to which an association is perceived by its leading representatives as a natural base for opinion moulding and political action. This kind of collective level emotional engagement was measured by asking respondents to assess the importance of political activity in Sweden for their respective associations. Hypothetically we expect associations scoring high on political mission in this sense to be more motivated to act politically.

Indeed, and in perfect harmony with a corresponding individual level hypothesis, it would hardly be surprising to find that associations declaring that political participation

is important also tend to perform more political activities than their politically dispassionate counterparts. However, in agreement with the claim made by VSB 1995 (343–368), a simultaneous consideration of resources and motivation is still methodologically warranted. Specifically, taking differences in political mission into account provides a test for indirect relationships in the purely resource based model. It might be that associations that acquire political resources to a greater extent also become politically motivated; if so, resources in this sense are politically ineffective unless they trigger political motivation. But it may also be the case that resources are politically valuable as such; in this scenario, controlling for the political mission of associations would rather leave previously established effects of resources intact.¹²

Completing the CVM guided route, a citizen may have a fair amount of political resources and motivation, and yet still refrain from active political involvement until s/he is explicitly asked to participate, for instance in a political campaign or protest march. Such efforts of political recruitment should thus be important to include in a model that aims to explain differences in the degree of political activity; not least considering that political recruiters are assumed to operate strategically in their search for prospects (Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1999; cf. Strömblad and Myrberg 2013). As a final step in our translation of the CVM overarching factors, we also acknowledge the reasonable occurrence, and importance, of external political stimuli on the organizational level. To this end, we consider voluntary associations' contacts with political parties and their elected representatives as an organizational level equivalent to political recruitment networks.

There are reasons to believe that associations receive opportunities to express opinions if some of their members know politicians on various levels—or at least know how to establish contact with them. Moreover, having such access to elected representatives would probably increase the likelihood of requests for political activity. Associations may be encouraged, as collectives, to take part in campaigns and manifestations if they are known by politicians who promote, or even coordinate, such activities. We tried to measure the range of this potentially important 'political network' through a detailed series of questions on each association's contacts with elected representatives and with political parties on the national, regional and local level.¹³

Expanding on our modified resource model by way of the measures discussed above, we obtain the results displayed in table 3. For both political participation indexes, we have again estimated two explanatory models; first adding political mission, and then also political network, to the resource variables.¹⁴

Studying signs as well as standard errors of the regression coefficients in table 3, the empirical evaluation clearly provides support for the impact of all three CVM factors on the associational level. All resource factors that proved to be significant in the prior, more restricted, models still show statistically significant effects. Thus, the analyses

imply that the participatory consequences of the resources we have highlighted are not due to differences between the associations in the willingness to act politically. Echoing the result from the original individual level CVM evaluation (VSB 1995: 350–354), resources of the kind we measure are politically valuable as such; they are not merely proxies for political motivation.

Table 3. Predicting associational level political participation by resources, motivation and recruitment

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

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

Note: Entries are OLS regression coefficients (*B*), and standard errors (*SE B*). The dependent variables (*Proclaiming activities* and *Protesting activities*) are additive indexes based on the classification of items in Table 1, ranging from 0 (the association did not take part in any of the mentioned activities) to 3 (the association took part in all mentioned activities at least the maximum number of times specified in the survey). See Appendix for further details, and information about the independent variables.

Still, we may also conclude that resource differences are not the only thing that matters. According to the empirical results, the degree of associational level political motivation and access to potential networks of recruitment are important factors too. All coefficients representing the effects of political mission and political network are positive and, save for one case, highly statistically significant as well. We note that the inclusion of political network, in model 2 and model 4 respectively, results in a substantial reduction of the effects of political mission. Still, for proclaiming activities both variables have significant positive effects after the final estimation. For protest activities, however, the coefficient for political mission is not satisfactorily robust once political networks are taken into account.

This difference between the two different modes of participation is interesting. However, the correct interpretation is not readily established, since firm conclusions regarding causality cannot be drawn, in particular given the cross-sectional data at hand. It might be that the politically motivated associations to a higher extent establish contacts with politicians. If this is the case, the effect of political mission, at least partly, runs through political network. The politically interested, and assumingly efficacious, associations thus tend to obtain even more inspiration and encouragement through their increased access to political recruiters. Equally conceivable though, is the possibility that contacts rather are set off by politicians, perhaps later on being administered via the offices of political parties. Consequently, a positive influence of political mission may be exaggerated, if the belief in the importance of political involvement within an association is stimulated by external encouragement from political elites. Neither scenario, however, explains why political mission, accounting for differences in political network, seems to be less important for protest oriented activities.

As a final remark, our measure of the density of political networks may to some extent capture actual political participation, if contacts are actually made *during* some specific political activity. On the other hand, in comparison with the original version of the CVM, the ‘distance’ between independent and dependent variables is arguably greater in this study. For example, it is not particularly surprising that people receiving requests for political participation tend to participate more regularly (cf. Strömblad & Myrberg 2013). It is less self-evident that a given association’s contacts with politicians exclusively reflect that it has taken part in the same (proclaiming and protesting) activities as its political acquaintances.

Conclusion and discussion

In this paper we have applied the Civic Voluntarism Model (CVM), originally developed to explain why some individuals more often than others take active part in political life (VSB 1995) on the organizational level. In an analytical experiment, with the purpose of translating CVM explanatory factors to the collective level, we utilized data from a survey of ethnic voluntary associations in Sweden.

The translation of, in essence, a rationalistic model (cf. Verba, Schlozman and Brady 2000) from the individual level to a collective level is hardly unique from a theoretical point of view. However, it is far less common to make such a translation subject to empirical evaluation. Moreover, judging from several interesting relationships emerging, our approach proved to be worthwhile. We have presented evidence of systematic and noteworthy differences between ethnic associations when it comes to their propensity to take part in political life in Sweden.

Quite in line with expectations, differences in terms of political motivation seem to be consequential also on the organizational level. Interestingly however, and in line

with what VSB 1995 demonstrate on the basis of individual level survey data, political resources matter for participation among collective actors as well, even if political motivation is taken into account. Hence, the actual possibilities to raise the political voice of an organization are affected by fairly basic resources as such. Much as available free time makes a difference for individual citizens' possibilities to participate politically, we conclude that the size of the association positively affects associational level political participation. Similarly, participation is furthered by an association's possibilities to coordinate and distribute information effectively.

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

Moreover, our results suggest that organizational level civic skills are enhanced in associations that have developed an internal culture characterised by participative democratic ideals. Widespread possibilities for members to influence their own associations thus appear to promote the political influence of the collective as well. At the same time, however, our analytical approach helped us illuminate an interesting example of contradictory tendencies in the accumulation of political resource capital. All else being equal, large associations tend to have better possibilities to organise and perform political activities. Still, the classic problem of optimal size of a democratic polity (e.g. Dahl and Tufte 1973) apparently applies to voluntary associations as well. The larger the association, the more difficult it becomes to involve members in collective decision-making procedures. Hence, an association with many members face a risk of diminishing the overall participative spirit that appears to be important for its political resource pool.

Conceptually and methodologically our analysis demonstrates how an individual level theory like the CVM can be fruitfully applied on the organizational level. Using the model's general logic, we have proposed operationalizations of resources, motivation and political recruitment networks that are theoretically conceivable as well as empirically measureable for voluntary associations—collective actors that, from time to time, may participate in political life. Complementing other approaches to associational level political participation, the CVM focuses on the generators of participation from the association's own viewpoint; it integrates resources, motivation and recruitment in one coherent framework, permitting analyses of the individual and collective levels with a unified theoretical terminology. Further, a joint framework of our approach and an individual level-based CVM analysis would also enable powerful multi-level analyses of the role of associational life in enhancing political participation..

Having presented suitable, although certainly not perfect, empirical measures, we were also able to replicate findings of supportive mechanisms, quite in line with

conventional tests of the original model. Where we have observed gaps and problems with the available empirical data, we have pointed at alternative measures and operationalizations. Still, since our empirical study is limited to a single country and a particular type of organisations, we encourage further studies, based on more tailor-made empirical data, as well as conducted in other cultural and institutional settings.

Appendix: Variable Coding and Descriptive Statistics

Proclaiming activities and *Protesting activities* are the measures of associational level political participation (the dependent variable) in this study; both variables are additive indexes (supported by dimensional analyses, cf. note 5) based on the reported degree of participation in the types of activities mentioned in Table 1. For each item, participation is measured by a scale 0–3, where 0=‘never’, 1=‘1–3 times’, 2=‘4–6 times’, and 3=‘7 times or more’ (referring to the past 12 months, at the time of the survey). Both index variables are finally rescaled to, again, range from 0 to 3.

Mean/Standard Deviation: 0.92 / 0.68 (proclaiming); 0.35 / 0.45 (protesting).

Size of association refers to a given association’s total number of members. Assuming a decreasing marginal utility of size, a logarithmic transformation is applied. Missing values are imputed for this variable to avoid an excessive loss of cases in the analyses (since approximately 10 percent of the associations did not report membership data). Median values of size were calculated for each type of association, and missing values were then replaced using the median for similar associations.

Mean/Standard deviation: 478 / 866

Space for activities is a dichotomy, taking on the value 1 if the association has access to a regular space, and 0 otherwise.

Mean/Standard deviation: 0.54 / 0.50

Information technology is a trichotomous variable taking on the value 0 if the association has no ‘equipment’ (specifically: telephone, mail address, computer, internet connection, e-mail or fax machine) for information distribution of its own, 1 if the association has a single type of such equipment, and 2 if the association has several types of such equipment.

Mean/Standard deviation: 1.5 / 0.8

Internal democracy denotes the proportion (0–1) of members participating in a given association's most recent general meeting.

Mean/Standard deviation: 0.38 / 0.29

Swedish usage is an additive index based on a series of questions on how frequently Swedish is used when conducting activities of various kinds (specifically: 'every-day/regular activities', 'member meetings', 'sending letters to members', 'sending letters to other contacts', 'board meetings', 'announcements about activities', and 'in writings and publications'). For each item, the usage of Swedish is measured by a scale 1–5, where 1='[activity] exclusively conducted in [the main language of the ethnic group]', 2='[activity] mostly conducted in [the main language of the ethnic group]', 3='[activity] conducted to about the same extent in Swedish and in [the main language of the ethnic group]', 4='[activity] mostly conducted in Swedish', and 5='[activity] exclusively conducted in Swedish'. The index variable is finally rescaled to, again, range from 1 to 5.

Mean/Standard Deviation: 2.8 / 0.9

Political mission is measured by a question on how a given association assess the importance of trying to build political opinion and make its views known to politicians and public authorities; the variable ranges from 1 to 5, where (corresponding to the response options) 1= 'highly unimportant', 2='rather unimportant', 3='neither important nor unimportant', 4='rather important', and 5='highly important'.

Mean/Standard Deviation: 3.0 / 1.6

Political network is an additive index based on a series of questions on whether a given association has had contacts with politicians; either with elected representatives in the national parliament, in a municipal council, or in a neighbourhood council, or with political parties operating at the national, regional or local level. All contacts of these kinds were summed into an index, theoretically ranging from 0 to 24, where the maximum number would represent contacts with all seven larger political parties (at the time of the data collection represented in the Swedish parliament) plus an optional 'other party', at all three different levels.

Mean/Standard Deviation: 2.9 / 3.7

Notes

¹ Elster 1983 is the classic work on states that are essentially unintended by-products, e.g. education and self-fulfilment as side effects of democratic procedures.

² A methodological advantage of analysing collectives as actors is that their ‘perceptions’ and ‘preferences’ can often be inferred on basis of what is said and written by individual representatives—in contrast to what goes on in the head of an individual actor.

³ The fieldwork was carried out in 2005, as 106 face-to-face interviews (yielding a response rate of 87 percent) by professional interviewers from Statistics Sweden. For further details, including the characteristics of the associations, see Strömblad, Myrberg & Bengtsson 2011.

⁴ Although we make use of techniques that, in principle, require continuous measurements, we recognize that the two political participation indexes we construct are crude approximations of interval level variables. Hence, we have also estimated the statistical models using ordinal logistic regression, to control for possible bias due to response options not being ordered on equidistant scales. This did not result in any substantially different conclusions, however.

⁵ These broader categories resemble generic modes such as ‘contacting’ on one hand, and ‘protest activity’ or ‘consumer participation’ on the other, suggested in survey based individual level comparative research on political participation (Teorell, Torcal and Montero 2007). The two-dimensional structure is based on the result from a principal-components factor analysis, rendering a two-factor solution with the conventional Kaiser criterion applied. The item ‘organize or participate in the occupation of a building or in a lock-up’ was also included in this series of questions in the survey; however, no associations reported having participated in this particular way.

⁶ Comparing relative frequencies for the additive indexes used as dependent variables, we may also conclude that as many as 87 percent of the associations have been engaged at least in some kind of proclaiming, while the corresponding figure for protesting is 51 percent. Still, the figures in table 1 may to some extent exaggerate the actual level of *political* activity. If the survey question had included a more restrictive formulation (to demarcate for instance only activities aimed at improving societal conditions) the validity would admittedly have been stronger.

⁷ However, one would also expect that associations with many members have access to a more diverse stock of competences. Thus, to some extent size may also be an indicator of associational level *motivation*. To what extent size is seen as an indicator of resources or motivation does not affect any substantial results in the following analyses.

⁸ It seems that the sensitivity of scrutinizing economic conditions made the respondents uncomfortable (approximately 11 percent refused to answer the question). Furthermore, multivariate analyses including also the size of the association proved to be problematic, as it resulted in a loss of a considerable number of cases due to list-wise deletion procedures.

⁹ The survey was administered in 2005; present-day differences in information technology at the organizational level, notably regarding internet access, may certainly be less pronounced..

¹⁰ In this case, we did not find any traces of indirect relationships either. In fact, even in the absence of all other independent variables, Swedish usage on the collective level as measured in this study does not have any statistically discernible effects on associational level political participation.

¹¹ We made an effort to utilize one of the survey items as a measure of ‘political efficacy’ in the analyses; specifically, regarding the expected possibilities of a given association to ‘contribute to improvements in Swedish society’. However, no relationships (not even bivariate) between this variable and the measures of participation could be discovered. Our interpretation is that in order to capture the ‘political self-confidence’ of an association, survey questions should (as in corresponding standard individual level survey items) explicitly relate to estimated abilities to influence precisely *politics*.

¹² Furthermore, being actually observable, this measure would stay clear of the tautological problem that Verba, Scholzman and Brady (2000) discuss in relation to their individual level motivational dimension.

¹³ As a supplement to the measure of political networks, we also constructed a corresponding variable for contacts with public authorities. The effects of this complementary ‘bureaucracy network’ variable on political participation proved to be very similar to the effects of political network. However, when these variables were simultaneously entered in the more complex regression models (cf. table 3) we did not find any evidence of independent direct effects of contacts with public authorities.

In addition, the survey included a direct measure of one specific type of invitations to political activity on the collective level. The associations were asked if they (during the last two-year period) ‘have been called to participate in decision-making processes’ (either on a permanent, or an occasional basis) in any neighborhood, municipal or national councils or committees. 25 of our 106 associations reported having been approached in this way. Yet, also in this case controlling for political network, we did not find any significant effects on actual political participation of such invitations to decision-making.

¹⁴ In comparison with the originally specified resource model, we have now left out the variables for which no direct effects on the political participation indexes could be traced; i.e. ‘space for activities’ and ‘Swedish usage’.

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