

Politics and Volunteering in Japan
A Global Perspective

Politics and Volunteering in Japan begins by painting a portrait of volunteering in Japan, and from this starting point it demonstrates that our current understandings of civil society have been based implicitly on a U.S. model that does not adequately consider participation patterns found in other parts of the world. The book develops a theory of civic participation that incorporates citizen attitudes about governmental and individual responsibility with societal and governmental practices that support (or hinder) volunteer participation. This theory is tested using cross-national and subnational statistical analysis, and it is refined through detailed case studies of volunteering in three Japanese cities. The findings are then used to build the Community Volunteerism Model, which explains and predicts both the types and rates of volunteering in communities around the world. The model is tested using four cross-national case studies (Finland, Japan, Turkey, and the United States) and three subnational case studies in Japan.

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MARY ALICE HADDAD

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To My Parents

For my mother who taught me to love the family trade

and

*For my father who taught me the value of perseverance and
dedication*

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Preface

Every day, millions of people perform a myriad of services in their communities for free. They might look after the elderly, clean parks, or risk their lives to put out a fire in a neighbor's house. These volunteers form the core of civil society, the organized element of society that lies between the family and the government. As such, they not only play an invaluable role in preserving and protecting their communities but, by acting as channels of communication with the government, also help keep democracies accountable to their publics.

Thus far, studies of comparative civil society have used three general approaches to explain why some communities or countries have much higher volunteer participation rates than others. They have examined how individual characteristics, such as education or income, increase the likelihood of individuals to volunteer; how social characteristics, such as levels of trust and social capital in a community, shape levels of volunteering; and how characteristics of government, such as levels of spending on social services, influence volunteer participation rates. All of these approaches have given us greater insights into volunteer behavior, but none of them can explain why volunteering is widespread in some communities whereas in others only a select few participate. Current approaches also cannot explain why one community might volunteer for organizations that work closely with their local governments, such as neighborhood associations or volunteer fire departments, whereas another might concentrate its resources on

advocacy or service organizations that tend to avoid significant government involvement.

This book takes a different approach to the study of volunteering. It argues that people do not volunteer in their communities because of their education level or level of social trust, or because the government spends a lot (or little) on social services. Rather, people around the world volunteer these valuable services for their communities because they think it is their civic responsibility to do so. Volunteers are performing a civic duty when they volunteer their time, their resources, even their lives for their communities. In the pages that follow, this book explores how this sense of civic duty is developed in different communities, and why it varies – in both content and intensity – from one community to another.

Ever since Robert Putnam's startling revelation in 1995 that Americans were "bowling alone," participating less and less in group activities, academics and the public have been reexamining democracy and the civic associations that were believed to be its immutable foundations. Although some of these inquiries took place in democracies outside North America, much of the understanding of citizen participation is based on an implicit model derived from the U.S. experience. This book joins in the dialogue about the relationship between citizen activities in voluntary and civic associations and the democracies they create. It does this, however, with a twist. Rather than taking the American democracy as its starting point, it begins its story in Japan. By placing the Japanese experience in a comparative perspective, the book comes to a very different understanding of volunteer participation, one that includes types, found across the globe, that go undetected or underappreciated in the American model.

Japanese have very high rates of participation in neighborhood associations, parent-teacher associations, volunteer fire departments, and other organizations that are locally based and work closely with the government. This type of volunteer participation, while present in the United States, is generally overlooked in favor of examining associational groups that build "social capital" (Putnam 2000), such as bowling leagues or book clubs; advocacy groups that promote particular political causes (Tarrow 1998; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995), such as the AARP or NAACP; or nonprofit organizations that provide social welfare services (Salamon et al. 1999), such as nonprofit

hospitals or schools. By overlooking groups like neighborhood associations, which work closely with the government, civil society scholars have mischaracterized volunteer participation in Japan and have misinterpreted the nature of civil society itself.

This book begins with the premise that civil society exists at the nexus of state and society, so patterns of participation can be explained only by exploring how civil society is shaped by the interaction of state and society. To this end, it explains participation patterns across as well as within countries. Citizen attitudes about individual and governmental responsibility for dealing with social problems determine the *types* of organizations that are prevalent in a community, and the practices of social and governmental institutions determine the *rates* of participation in a community.

This examination of the nature of civil society highlights the prevalence and importance of civic organizations that target the bureaucracy, rather than politicians or the courts, in their attempts to inject citizen accountability into government policy making and implementation. Additionally, it demonstrates how community-level factors can encourage (or discourage) volunteer participation by contributing to the development and transmission of norms of civic responsibility. Civic organizations lie at the heart of the state-society relationship, and understanding why volunteering patterns emerge as they do provides important clues about the dynamic relationship between democratic citizens and their governments.

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This project has been an inspiration. Writing a book is a grueling experience, but I have been privileged to study a subject matter that has constantly put me in contact with the often forgotten, often overlooked elements of humanity that keep societies running in a positive direction. These are the people who are getting things done for their communities. Although many of them are dealing with intractable problems such as poverty, aging, truancy, and fire hazards, the men and women that I met – many in their sixties and seventies – are identifying problems, crafting solutions, and making life better for their neighbors. They are quiet, humble people who are putting in long hours and hard work to improve their communities, and they are succeeding. In a world where the media overwhelm us with stories of misery and hopelessness, it has been wonderful to spend some time in places where people are doing right by one another by making their small corner of the globe better for each other and for the next generation.

As with all long projects, I have accumulated many debts, most of which I will never be able to repay. I hope that those many individuals and institutions that have helped me along the way can have some satisfaction and pride knowing that their contributions have been invaluable to the completion of this work.

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