Who Lends a Hand to Government? The Impact of Social Capital on Governmental Volunteering

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Abstract

Governmental volunteering has received increased recognition in recent years. Results of the research reported here show the impact of social capital on governmental volunteering. Based on the Texas Adults Survey, four indicators of social capital have been identified—asked to volunteer, non-religious group meeting attendance, children living in household, and norm of trust. These social capital indicators are incorporated in the governmental volunteering model, with control variables such as human capital indicators, working status, religiosity, and demographic factors (age, gender, race, etc.). The results confirm the importance of social capital in explaining governmental volunteering—individuals with greater stocks of social capital are more likely to participate in governmental volunteering. Further, the results also indicate that social capital has different impacts on governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering—it plays a more important role in governmental volunteering. Research results suggest that researchers should revisit the conventional views of volunteering and incorporate social capital factors in studies of volunteering. Finally, the results offer practical value to practitioners in volunteer administration, especially practitioners in government volunteer programs—social capital factors could be used to increase volunteer recruitment in public service delivery.

Key Words: social capital; volunteering; governmental volunteering

Introduction

Volunteering—unpaid help given to benefit other people, social movements, or society at large—has been at the core of the social sciences in the last quarter century (Wilson, 2012). It is generally accepted that most volunteering occurs in nonprofit organizations, churches, and other religious groups. People sometimes do not recognize that volunteering also happens in governmental entities (Dover, 2010). Volunteers helping the government in the United States dates back to as early as the beginning of the new republic, when citizens assisted the inexperienced government in social welfare, education, the arts, and other local issues (Ellis and Campbell, 1978). Throughout history, Americans have played an active role in helping their government and their active involvement has increased government's capacity for public problem solving. Especially during this economic down turn, government volunteers fill in the gaps left by budget and staff cuts. From cleaning up highways to assisting firefighters, volunteers represent an attractive source for government in public service delivery. For example, in Virginia, Stafford County recruits residents to perform duties such as answering phone calls and cleaning up public cemeteries (Brock, 2010). In Georgia, where

appropriations for state parks shrank by 40 percent, the number of "Friends of the Georgia State Parks" volunteers has doubled over the past two years (Goodale, 2011). Such stories have become familiar as more governments start to realize the value of using volunteers in public service delivery.

Volunteerism is a type of collective social action. Individuals who volunteer typically possess a degree of compassion and commitment to others and to society as a whole. Social capital—"the collective value of all social networks and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other" —seems likely to play a role in facilitating collective social action and philanthropic behavior in a community (Putnam, 2001, p.19; Brown & Ferris, 2007). Compared to informal volunteering (such as helping a friend or a neighbor in the same church community), governmental volunteering, which is often organized through some agencies and associations, is public and formal. In this sense, it seems that governmental volunteering might require more social capital.

Research on volunteering in public agencies is not as abundant as it is in nonprofit organizations. The scarce research on governmental volunteering mostly takes an institutional perspective, examining the organizational models of government volunteer program design and management, relationship between volunteers and government staff, and barriers to utilizing volunteers in the public sector (Brudney & Kellough, 2000; Rehnborg, Fallon, & Hinerfeld, 2002; Gazley & Brudney, 2005; Dover, 2010). Little research has investigated the antecedents of governmental volunteering. The authors sought to explore the impact of social capital on governmental volunteering. The research is based on Wilson and Musick's (1997) volunteer supply model, which posits that the basic resources that an individual possesses—human capital, social capital, and cultural capital—are very important predictors of volunteering (1997). A governmental volunteering model is derived from the volunteer supply model, using social capital as the primary independent variable with a variety of controls such as human capital, working status, religiosity, and other demographic factors (age, gender, race, and being native Texans). A two-part analysis is used to test the governmental volunteering model: first, a logistic regression analysis examines how social capital influences governmental volunteering; then a multinomial logistic regression further examines whether social capital influences governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering differently.

The results from the analysis confirm the importance of social capital in governmental volunteering. The logistic regression analysis shows that individuals with greater stocks of social capital are more likely to volunteer for government. The multinomial logistic regression further suggests that the role social capital plays in governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering is, to some extent, different. This study has potential contributions, both academically and practically. It deepens understanding of governmental volunteering and broadens the application of social capital concept in explaining volunteering. It also suggests that practitioners and public officials can use social capital (networks) to increase the successful recruitment of citizen volunteers in public service delivery. The sole focus on Texas residents is the limitation of the research reported here. However, this should not dilute the potential value of this study, since the survey used in this paper is by far the only one that clearly identifies governmental volunteering. Further research

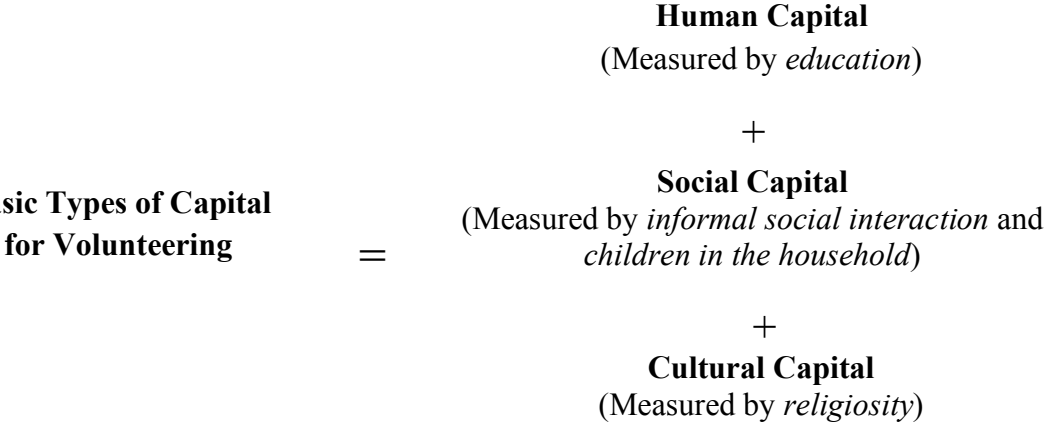
has to await national surveys on governmental volunteering.

A Sociological Theory of Volunteering—Volunteer Supply Model

Voluntary work, by nature, is a type of productive activity. Like any other type of productive activity in the labor market, individuals who provide voluntary work should possess some basic "qualifications." Scholars use the term "capital" to represent the qualifications an individual has that facilitate productive activities; for example, knowledge, social ties, the ability to use tools, etc.

Wilson and Musick (1997) examine whether different types of voluntary work demand different amounts of "capital." They find that formal volunteering, which is undertaken on behalf of a collective good, is usually directed through some organizations, and requires more social capital (See Figure 1: Wilson and Music's Volunteer Supply Model). Governmental volunteering, by this definition, is a type of formal volunteering. Because social capital is an important resource for collective action, it is reasonable to hypothesize that social capital plays an important role in governmental volunteering. Therefore, the research question is: does social capital have a positive impact on governmental volunteering? Second, does social capital have the same impact on governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering?

Figure 1: Wilson and Music's Volunteer Supply Model



Modeling Governmental Volunteering

The governmental volunteering model in this study is based on Wilson and Musick's (1997) volunteer supply model, with social capital as the independent variable and a set of demographic variables as controls.

Measuring Social Capital

According to Lin (2002), social capital is the capital captured through social relations. It is defined as the "resources embedded in social networks accessed and used by actors for actions" (p. 25). This concept shows that unlike human capital (e.g., skills, knowledge, certifications, etc.), which is rooted in individuals, social capital is embedded in social relations (e.g., friendship, organization membership, etc.). It is a resource that facilitates collective actions and enhances the outcomes of these actions. Individuals with more social capital have more channels to learn about volunteer

opportunities; they are also more likely to be recognized and recruited by government agencies as volunteers. Therefore, I hypothesize that social capital has a positive impact on governmental volunteering.

One of the major weaknesses of the social capital concept is the absence of a consensus on how to measure it (Fukuyama, 2001). Because social capital is not directly observable, it can be specified in different ways. Scholars have been trying to develop "theoretically coherent and empirically valid typologies or dimensions" to measure social capital, but are nowhere near a "canonical account of the dimensions of social capital" (Putnam, 2001, p. 42). Depending on the research question, the research object, and the specific context, they measure social capital differently.

Wilson and Musick (1997) have used two indicators to measure social capital—informal social interaction and number of children in the household. The first indicator, informal social interaction, is measured by the frequency with which an individual has conversations and meetings with friends and acquaintances. The authors assume that people who have more informal social interactions tend to have more friends and are more likely to volunteer. They justify their second indicator by assuming that children in the household could draw their parents into more social interactions, such as participating in school and community activities.

Using factor analysis, Brown and Ferris (2007) have identified two dimensions of social capital based on a survey conducted by a Harvard research team. The first dimension of social capital is social network, which captures an individual's wealth of associational ties. The second dimension is the norm of social trust, which measures an individual's trust and faith in others and civic institutions.

Based on methods that scholars have adopted in measuring social capital, four dimensions of social capital have been identified for this study: 1) social interaction; 2) group meeting attendance; 3) children living in the household; and 4) norm of trust.

Asked to volunteer is used as an indicator of social interaction to measure social capital. People with more social capital and larger social networks are more likely to be asked by others for voluntary work. They are also more able to reach other people and ask others to join the volunteer work. Scholars find a positive impact of being asked to volunteer on volunteering. Bryant, Jeon-Slaughter, Kang & Tax (2003) find that 80 percent of those who have been asked to volunteer have actually volunteered, compared to only 21 percent of people who have volunteered without being asked. Wilson provides another explanation that people's behaviors are influenced by others in their social networks. For example, people may follow what their neighbors or friends do; they do not want to let their friends down when asked to volunteer (2000).

The second indicator is *non-religious group meeting attendance*, measured by whether an individual has attended meetings of any non-religious groups/associations to which he belongs. Putnam and other scholars argue that group membership facilitates the production of social capital because people who join organizations generally have more opportunities to meet others, and to develop an extensive system of social relationships (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 1995; La Due Lake & Huckfeldt, 1998). In his later work, Putnam uses group meeting attendance instead of group membership because the actual participation and interaction in group networks measure social capital better. Since "religiosity" is incorporated in governmental volunteering

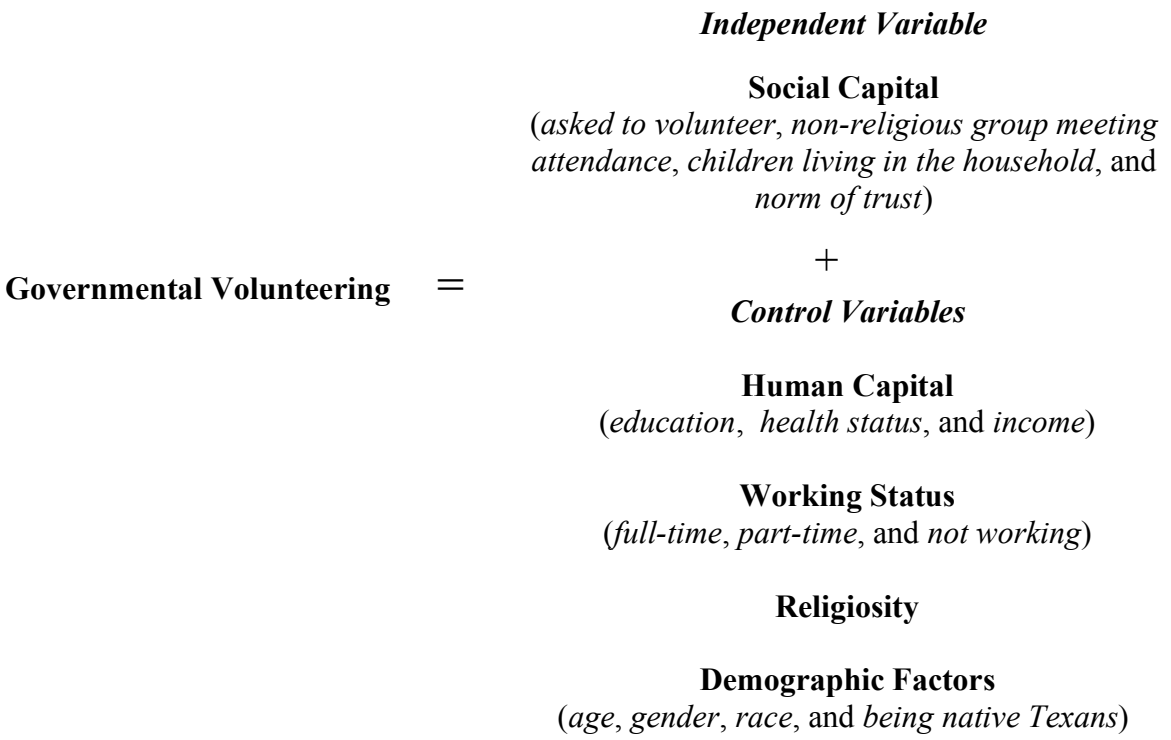
model as a control variable, religious group membership and religious group meeting attendance are excluded.

Children living in the household is the third indicator of social capital. Children "create more pressing obligations" for their parents (Wilson& Musick, 1997, p. 701). For example, school-age children create social ties that link their parents to other adults in the neighborhood and other social institutions around children's needs such as schools, youth-development groups, sports teams, and recreational organizations, most of which are likely to expect voluntary contributions (Rotolo & Wilson, 2007).

Trust is also a widely used indicator of social capital. Fukuyama (2001) has surmised that level of trust is one of the two most broadly used approaches to measure social capital (the other measure is group memberships). Scholars such as Putnam (2001), Brown, and Ferris (2007) all have found a positive impact of social trust on volunteering.

Control Variables. In addition to social capital, the model also includes variables that have been shown to be statistical significant in previous studies. These factors are grouped into four sets: 1) human capital, 2) working status, 3) religiosity, and 4) demographic factors. Figure 2 describes how these variables are incorporated in the model.

Figure 2: Governmental Volunteering Model



Data, Variables, and Method

The study reported here uses data from the Texas Adults Survey, conducted by Musick (2004) of the University of Texas at Austin. Compared to the Volunteer Supplement data from the Current Population Survey, the advantage of this data is that it identifies governmental volunteering, which allows the researchers to investigate factors that impact governmental volunteering.

The Texas Adults Survey asked whether respondents had volunteered and whether they had volunteered "for state or local government or a government-related organization... [e.g.], a public school, fire department, or licensing agency, or any work that is often done by government agencies, such as high-way clean-up or park service" (Musick, 2004, p. 34). Among the respondents, 23% of them had volunteered for government or government-related organizations. They are identified as "government volunteers". The "non-government volunteers" are those who had volunteered but did not volunteer with government. They are identified by subtracting the government volunteers from the overall volunteer population. The non-government volunteers account for 48% of the total respondents. Thus, the dependent variable describes three options a person could choose, including "no volunteering". Table 1 describes the definitions and statistics of the dependent variable, independent variables, and control variables. The proportions (means) are presented for the dummy variables, while the means and standard deviations are presented for the continuous and ordinal variable.

Table 1 Variable Definition and Descriptive Statistics

	Definition and Coding	Proportion or Mean (Std. Dev.)
Dependent Variable		
Types of Volunteering		
Government Volunteers	Volunteer for state/local government or government-related organizations over the past 12 months Coded 1 if yes	0.23
Non-Government Volunteers	Volunteer for only non-governmental organizations over the past 12 months Coded 2 if yes	0.48
No Volunteering	Did not do any volunteer work over the past 12 months Coded 3 if yes	0.29
Independent Variable		
Social Capital		
Asked to Volunteer	Has been asked to volunteer over the past 12 months Coded 1 if yes; 0 if no	0.55
Meeting Attendance	The respondent has attended non-religious group meeting in the past 12 months Coded 1 if yes; 0 if not	0.27
Children in Household	Has children currently living in the household Coded 1 if yes; 0 if no	0.48
Trust	The respondent's view of people in general, measured by a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means that people are "perverse and corrupt" and 7 means that people are "basically good"	4.93 (1.56)
Control Variable		
Human Capital		
Education		
Master's degree or higher	Coded 1 if the respondent has a master's degree or higher degrees	0.11
Bachelor's degree or Associate degree	Coded 1 if the respondent has a bachelor's degree or associate degree	0.39

High school degree or lower	Coded 1 if the respondent has a high school degree or lower degrees	0.49
Physical Health	The respondent's physical health status, measured by a scale of 1~5 where 1 represents "Excellent", 2 represents "Very good", 3 represents "Good", 4 represents "Fair", and 5 represents "Poor"	2.53 (1.09)
Mental Health	The respondent's mental health status, measured by a scale of 1~5 where 1 represents "Excellent", 2 represents "Very good", 3 represents "Good", 4 represents "Fair", and 5 represents "Poor"	1.95 (1.00)
Income ($10,000s)	The household income divided by 10,000	6.24 (6.06)
Working Status		
Full-time	Work 52 weeks a year	0.42
Part-time	Work less than 52 weeks a year	0.12
Not Working	Not on the labor market	0.44
Religiosity	General religiosity, measured by a scale from 1 to 7 where 1 means "Not at all religious" and 7 means "Very religious"	4.85 (1.70)
Demographic Factors		
Age	The respondent's age, ranging from 18 to 94	45.70 (16.47)
Age Square	Squared age	2360.13 (1619.49)
Gender	Coded 1 if male; 0 if female	0.38
Race		
White	Coded 1 if White; 0 if not	0.65
Black	Coded 1 if African American; 0 if not	0.07
Latino	Coded 1 if Hispanic or Latino; 0 if not	0.22
Other	Coded 1 if Asian, Native American, and other races; 0 if not	0.04
Native Texans	Coded 1 if the respondent was born in Texas; 0 if not	0.56

Source: Survey of Texas Adults, 2004

Logistic regression is used and the results are reported in the form of probability changes to make the findings easier to understand. This part of the analysis allowed researchers to observe how social capital and other factors influence governmental volunteering. Secondly, a multinomial logistic regression was conducted to further examine the differences between governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering. The multinomial logistic regression compares multiple groups through a combination of binary logistic regressions. Using the non-governmental volunteering as the base category, the multinomial logistic analysis allowed researchers to observe, directly, whether social capital has different impacts on governmental and non-governmental volunteering.

Results

The results show that social capital indicators play a direct role in determining governmental volunteering. Moreover, human capital (education) and race (black) also have significant impacts on governmental volunteering (see Table 2). These results indicate the magnitude of these impacts and demonstrate the importance of incorporating social capital measures into the study of governmental volunteering.

Table 2 Logistic Analysis of Governmental Volunteering

	Logistic Coefficient	(Z-Statistics)	Changes in Predicted Probabilities
Independent Variable			
Social Capital			
Asked to Volunteer	1.25***	(6.30)	0.20
Meeting Attendance	0.53**	(2.94)	0.10
Children in Household	0.72***	(3.88)	0.12
Trust	0.01	(0.19)	0.00
Control Variable			
Human Capital			
Education			
Master's degree or higher	0.86**	(3.12)	0.17
Bachelor's degree or Associate degree	0.74***	(4.02)	0.13
Health Status			
Physical Health	0.11	(1.29)	0.02
Mental Health	-0.02	(-0.18)	-0.00
Income ($10,000s)	-0.01	(-0.57)	-0.00
Working Status			
Full-time	-0.21	(-0.86)	-0.03
Not Working	-0.21	(-0.79)	-0.03
Religiosity	0.00	(0.02)	0.00
Demographic Factors			
Age	0.02	(0.47)	0.00
Age Square	-0.00	(-0.57)	-0.00
Gender	-0.03	(-0.18)	-0.01
Race			
Black	0.88**	(2.79)	0.18
Latino	0.35	(0.11)	0.06
Other	0.07	(0.87)	0.01
Native Texans	0.13	(0.43)	0.02

*** p<0.001 ** p<0.01 * p<0.05

Source: Survey of Texas Adults, 2004

Social capital matters for governmental volunteering. The two strongest indicators are being asked to volunteer and children living in the household. Holding the other variables at their means, people who have been asked to volunteer are 20 percentage points more likely to volunteer for government; for people who currently have children living in the household, they are 12 percentage points more likely to participate in governmental volunteering. Attending group meetings also was a predictor of governmental volunteering. People who attended non-religious group meetings at least once in the past 12 months are 10 percentage points more likely to volunteer for government agencies than those who did not attend any non-religious meetings.

Human capital also matters. Holding other variables at their means, the probability of participating in governmental volunteering for people who hold a master's degree or higher is 17 percentage points greater than for people who only have high school education or less. People who have a bachelor's degree or associate degree are 13 percentage points more likely to engage in governmental volunteering than people who have a high school degree or less.

The result is interesting in terms of governmental volunteering behavior among African Americans. In general, research has found that African Americans volunteer less frequently than white Americans (Wilson, 2012). A number of studies conclude that the lack of human capital among African Americans explains this racial difference (Clary, Snyder, & Stukas, 1996; Wilson & Musick, 1997). The findings in this study confirm this conclusion that once controlling for social capital, human capital, and other variables, African-Americans seem to do more governmental voluntary work than comparable whites.

Multinomial regression analysis compares the different impacts of social capital on governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering. According to Table 3, the impacts of being asked to volunteer on the two types of volunteering seem to be similar—a 19-percentage-point increase for governmental volunteering and 20-percentage-point increase for non-governmental volunteering. Non-religious group meeting attendance is more influential in governmental volunteering—it increases the likelihood of governmental volunteering by 11 percentage points but only by 2 percentage points for non-governmental volunteering. Children living in the household is a very strong predictor of governmental volunteering. It increases the probability of volunteering for the government by 13 percentage points. The 13-percentage-point decrease in non-governmental volunteering indicates that new volunteers who contributed to government volunteering are primarily drawn from people who would have volunteered for non-government organization.

Table 3 Multinomial Logistic Analysis of Volunteering in Different Groups

	Logistic Coefficient (Z-Statistics)		Changes in Predicted Probabilities[1]		
	Gov. Volunteers vs. Non-Gov. Volunteers		Gov. Volunteers	Non-Gov. Volunteers	No Volunteering
Independent Variable					
Social Capital					
Asked to Volunteer	0.52*	(2.48)	0.19	0.20	-0.39
Meeting Attendance	0.39*	(2.12)	0.11	0.02	-0.13
Children in Household	0.74***	(3.91)	0.13	-0.13	-0.00
Trust	-0.01	(-0.10)	0.00	0.01	-0.01
Control Variable					
Human Capital					
Education					
Master's degree or higher	0.76**	(2.69)	0.18	-0.09	-0.09
Bachelor's degree or Associate degree	0.66***	(3.51)	0.13	-0.08	-0.05
Health Status					
Physical Health	0.15	(1.61)	0.02	-0.03	0.01
Mental Health	-0.02	(-0.20)	-0.00	0.00	0.00
Income ($10,000s)	-0.01	(-0.75)	-0.00	0.00	-0.00
Working Status					
Full-time	-0.22	(-0.89)	-0.04	0.04	-0.00
Not Working	-0.24	(-0.87)	-0.04	0.05	-0.02
Religiosity	-0.02	(-0.34)	0.00	0.01	-0.01
Demographic Factors					
Age	0.02	(0.61)	0.00	-0.00	0.00

Age Square	-0.00	(-0.63)	-0.00	0.00	0.00
Gender	0.00	(0.02)	-0.00	-0.01	0.02
Race					
Black	0.99**	(2.95)	0.18	-0.21	0.03
Latino	0.43#	(1.90)	0.07	-0.10	0.03
Other	0.13	(0.29)	0.01	-0.06	0.05
Native Texans	0.05	(0.28)	0.02	0.02	-0.04

*** p<0.001 ** p<0.01 * p<0.05 # p<0.1

Source: Survey of Texas Adults, 2004

Note1: Some of the changes in predicted possibilities in the three volunteer groups do not add up to 0 due to rounding.

Indicators of human capital also show different impacts on governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering. Compared to individuals who only have high school education or less, those with bachelor's or higher degrees are more likely to volunteer for government agencies and seem to be less likely to be involved in non-governmental volunteering.

The multinomial logistic regression results show an even more striking preference among African-Americans to participate in governmental volunteering. Holding all the other variables at their means, African-Americans are 18 percentage points more likely to volunteer for government agencies than comparable whites, while they are 21 percentage points less likely than whites to participate in non-governmental volunteering.

Conclusion

This study is derived from Wilson and Musick (1997) volunteer supply model with the perspective that voluntary work, like any other type of productive activity, requires basic resources (social capital, human capital, etc.) that enable individuals to be "qualified" enough to enter the volunteer labor market.

The logistic regression results suggest that social capital plays an important role in governmental volunteering. Individuals with greater stocks of social capital—those who are more likely to be asked to volunteer, who are members of non-religious groups/associations and attend group meetings, and who have children currently living in the household—tend to be more likely to participate in governmental volunteering. The multinomial logistic regression results further indicate that the role social capital plays in shaping the generosity toward governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering, to some extent, is different. Being asked to volunteer increases the probability of volunteering for both government agencies and non-governmental organizations to almost the same extent. Factors such as non-religious group meeting attendance and children living in the household serve as stronger predictors of governmental volunteering.

The two-part analysis clearly suggests that social capital matters in governmental volunteering. These results highlight the importance of individuals' children and their associations in connecting them to others and to organizations that encourage them to get involved in public service delivery. Because the original survey question did not ask if those respondents who had volunteered for government agencies also had volunteered for any non-government organizations, the "government volunteers" variable might include some who have volunteered for both government agencies and non-governmental organizations, although the "non-government volunteers" are strictly those who only have volunteered for non-governmental organizations. It is reasonable to expect that if those non-government volunteers could be excluded from the government volunteers group in this model, the different impacts of social capital on governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering might become clearer. A more rigorous test of the impacts of social capital on the two types of volunteering has to await data that permits the disaggregation of governmental volunteering and non-governmental volunteering.

The results from the analysis also enable the researchers to draw a number of other conclusions. For example, it is possible that the lower volunteer rates for African-Americans are primarily accounted for by African-Americans' lower stocks of social capital, human capital, and other

resources that inhibit them volunteering. Controlling for those resources, African-Americans show even higher volunteer rates than comparable whites in helping government with public service delivery. This probably resonates with some research that besides religious volunteering, African Americans are also more likely than white volunteers to focus on needs in the black community—efforts to deal with crime, provide human services, and organize for local political initiatives, most of which are government-related work (Sundeen, 1992; Portney & Berry, 1997).

In all, this study has important implications for the understanding of social capital's role in volunteering, especially in governmental volunteering. It suggests that the conventional wisdom from previous studies of volunteering may need to be revisited in light of the omission of social capital factors. It also provides insights to practitioners in volunteer resource mangement that social capital factors could be used to increase volunteer recruitment. The strategic use of social ties could bring more hands from citizens to help volunteer administrators in public agencies with public service delivery.

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