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Abstract

Purpose

Various international and national social work ethical principles call social workers to participate in politics, although not all social workers in the United States and Switzerland embrace politics in their professional practice. A growing body of social work literature addresses social workers' participation in politics. This article presents a comparative study of political participation, political efficacy, and political ideology among social workers in the United States and Switzerland.

Methods

This study used two separate cross-sectional surveys to better understand the political participation, political efficacy, and political ideology of social workers in the United States (n=3033) and Switzerland (n=1242).

Results

The results indicate that US social workers are more politically active and have a higher internal sense of political efficacy than Swiss social workers. Regarding political ideology, the Swiss participants position themselves more clearly on the left wing than their US colleagues.

Conclusion

As one of few international practice comparison pieces, this article aims to further stimulate research on political activity of social workers. For this purpose, starting points is by further developing the political efficacy of social workers and further educating social workers during and after social work education about engaging in justice related activities to better society and the lives of their clients.

Keywords: Civic Voluntarism Model, policy practice, macro social work, political participation, civic participation, international comparison, Switzerland, United States of America

Using the Civic Voluntarism Model to Compare the Political Participation of

US and Swiss Social Workers

A growing body of social work literature addresses social workers' participation in

politics, both in the United States and across the globe. Although political participation has been

an integral part of the social work profession starting from the Progressive Era in the United

States (Stern & Axinn, 2017), social workers direct involvement crests and falls according to

broader national and international forces, such as war, movements away from democratic

governments, capital earnings over fair labor laws and practices, and inequitable social and

economic policies. Currently, a renewed effort to integrate politics into social work practice

internationally appears to be overlooked in the United States, where social workers seem

reluctant to challenge political actors and systems of power as part of their practice—although

such challenge is central to social work values and ethics (Ostrander, 2017). Political

participation is an ethical standard of the US National Association of Social Workers (NASW)

(2017) and the Swiss Association of Social Workers, AvenirSocial (2010) Code of Ethics, as

well as the International Federation of Social Workers (2018) mission statement, and the Council

on Social Work Education's (2015) Educational Policies and Accreditation Standards. These

professional, ethical, and values-based mandates charge social workers to confront social

injustice in all forms and advocate for systematic change, which requires one to hold political

opinions and wield power (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Ortiz & Jani 2010; Reisch & Jani, 2012;

Weinberg, 2010).

Although a number of studies have examined the political involvement of social workers in a

particular country or region (for an overview of the current state of research see Kindler, in

press), very little comparative international research has been conducted on the subject (Gray et

al., 2002; Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2014; Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2017). For that matter, the authors could

not find evidence of the political activity of social workers in Switzerland or the United States

being compared to that of other countries. The US and Swiss contexts present a unique

comparative opportunity given the difference in the development of social work in the respective

countries. The US has a longer and considerably more developed professional history of both

branches of social work--Charity Organization Societies (COS) and Settlement House

Movement--than Switzerland. In Switzerland, social work developed primarily from the fight

against poverty mainly organized by women in the 19th century, which is parallel to the COS. In

1896, there were 5695 women's associations in Switzerland with about 100,000 members who

were committed to promoting financial help on an individual level. Following the example of the

international settlement movement, the pioneers of social work in Switzerland increasingly

complemented the support of individuals with social reforms and advocated for a

professionalization of the training of social workers. Settlements did not develop in Switzerland

until after the First World War, and few have existed since (Matter, 2011; Epple & Schär, 2015).

Using data from two voluntary self-administered, self-report surveys, this article aims to fill this

gap by comparing the political activity, political efficacy, and political ideology of licensed

social workers in the United States to social workers in Switzerland.

Literature Review

Political Participation Framework: Civic Voluntarism Model

Social work practice is intrinsically connected to social and political contexts. In the

academic literature, socio-political and economic practice contexts are frequently highlighted. To

better understand political participation in general in the United States, Verba, Scholzman, and

Brady created the Civic Voluntarism Model, (CVM). The most frequently used political science

model in United States research (Lane & Humphreys, 2011), the CVM was used in the political

science literature to better understand the political participation of a range of populations and

contexts, including gender and racial political differences in the South (Fullerton & Stern, 2010;

Fullerton & Stern, 2013), Latino immigrants in the Midwest (Sandoval & Jennings, 2012), and

the rising economic inequality and political participation in New York City (Levin-Waldman,

2013).

Verba et al. (1995) define political participation as "directly…affecting the making or

implementation of public policy or indirectly by influencing the selection of people who make

those policies" (p. 38). The CVM posits that political engagement requires three critical elements

for people to be (1) motivated, (2) able to participate, and (3) they are most likely to do so if they

are a part of groups that request such participation. These three integral components are

conceptualized in the CVM as: *resources*, *engagement*, and *recruitment. Resources* are

considered essential to possess the capacity to engage in political activities, including time,

money, and civic experience. *Engagement* is necessary to political participation because it

creates an essential connection to communities and their individual members through political

interests, partisanship, political ideology, and etc. *Recruitment* encourages people to engage in

political activity, whether or not directly asked, and is fundamental to the model (Verba et al.,

1995). Also integral to this model is the attainment and exercise of civic skills, which Verba et

al. describe as "communications and organizational abilities that allow citizens to use time and

money effectively in political life" (p. 304). These skills, which are developed early in one's life

and utilized in non-political environments such as work, volunteer and religious organizations,

impact individuals' motivation and capacity (resources) for political activity. As noted by Verba

et al, these early factors that contribute to political participation are cumulative over the life

course, and those with privilege experience increased advantage over those without. The CVM

asserts that exercising civic skills in these arenas can facilitate political participation through the

development of relevant skills, such as decision-making, planning or chairing meetings, and

public-speaking (p. 273). In addition, the institutional context in which such opportunities are

presented, and personal characteristics must also be taken into consideration, as some individuals

will engage at greater levels than others.

Rubenson (2000) compares the CVM to social capital theory, which involves "networks of

association, trust and norms of reciprocity" (p. 10) and is another model which holds

participation in non-political arenas as key in influencing both the caliber of political

institutions and explaining political participation. He concludes that while both models make

valid contributions, they fail to adequately explain differences in political participation. Based

on an assessment of literature that directly addresses social work's person-in-environment

perspective, it is our position that individual factors related to personal power and privilege

may be instrumental in influencing motivation through perceptions of efficacy. Holbrook,

Sterret, Johnson & Krysan (2015) found that issue-specific factors accounted for significant

differences in political participation by race. Enloe (2004) and Friedman found that the political

arena is perceived differently by men and women based primarily on their societal beliefs

concerning the heteronormative gender roles and expectations of men and women. Fox and

Lawless (2003; 2012) specifically found that such gender norms impact women's self-

perception of being qualified to engage in politics (Enloe, 2004; Freedman, 2002). While

literature exists on the role of gender and political participation (Ostrander, Bryan, & Lane,

2019a), there is a paucity of literature specific to race, and even less is known about how race

and gender, and their intersection (Hardy-Fanta, 1993; Jaramillo, 2010; Moore, 2005), affect

political participation (Simien, 2007).

In social work, a handful of studies on political participation have used the CVM and

included practitioners who have been identified using social work licensure or other non-NASW

membership lists. Among these studies is Ritter (2008), who used a more diverse and richer

sampling pool to compare the political participation of licensed social workers from eleven states

across the country to participation among the general public. Her study found that: licensed

social workers engaged in politics regardless of their access to resources; partisanship/political

ideology did not predict the political participation of licensed social workers; and very few

licensed social workers had been recruited into political activity—although the vast majority of

licensed social workers belonged to religious organizations or civic and voluntary organizations.

In 2011, Lane (2011) used snowball sampling to identify social workers who had run for political

office at the state and local levels. She identified 467 social workers and found that 84% believed

they had an ethical obligation to change policy and less than half (48%) had learned about the

political process during their social work education. Further, the participant's access to resources

(e.g., money, time, energy) was found to be instrumental in deciding to run for office or not.

Ostrander and Kelly's (2019) qualitative study of clinical social workers described women who

voiced a lack of resources—including time and civic skills— and consequently lacked political

efficacy as evidenced by their low levels of political participation. Finally, Hoefer (2013) builds

upon Verba, et al's model for the social work profession, describing the CVM as a useful model

for understanding social workers' engagement in policy practice. (for a more robust list of

studies that utilized the CVM, please see McClendon, Lane, Ostrander, and Smith, 2020)

In comparison to the United States, study of political participation in Switzerland is nascent. Only one study has been conducted to date: Kindler (2019a) used the CVM to focus on factors influencing the political participation of social workers in all states in Switzerland. This research identified membership in professional organizations, political interest, internal political efficacy, agreement with political social work and the strength of left-right-ideology as main influencing factors. Regionally, however, Kulke and Schmidt (2019) used the CVM in Germany and found that social workers who are more interested in politics, who remember political content as part of their education, or who belong to a professional association, tend to work more toward the political mandate of social work. Thus, 76% of the members of the German Association of Social Workers (DBSH) state that they work with a political understanding of social work as compared to 59% of all the study participants. While the CVM has been used internationally, Ghana (Bob-Milliar, 2012), Romania (Tatar, 2015), Spain (Serrat, Villar & Celdran, 2015), Sweden (Lidstrom, 2013), no cross-cultural comparisons have been made to date.

Research Questions

The purpose of this research is to utilize the CVM and its components to identify the differences between US and Swiss social workers concerning their political participation. Each of the following research questions addresses a component of the model:

Research question 1 (Resources): How does political activity differ between US and Swiss social workers?

Research question 2 (Engagement): How does political efficacy (internal and external) differ between US and Swiss social workers?

Research question 3 (Engagement): How does US and Swiss social workers identify in terms

of political ideology?

Research question 4 (Recruitment): How do recruitment networks increase political activity

for US and Swiss social workers?

Methods

The data described here were collected from US and Swiss social work participants

through two separate voluntary self-administered, self-report surveys that included scales and

items that could be used for comparison. The first author developed his questionnaire in 2017

based on findings from his dissertation work, a review of the literature, and feedback from

political social work experts. The questionnaire consisted of 85 closed- and open-ended items

organized into eight sections and was sent to 44, 552 US social workers. The second author

developed his questionnaire in 2017 and 2018 based on a broad review of the literature and after

several consultations with the first author. The questionnaire consisted of 77 closed- and open-

ended items organized into five sections and was sent to 40,000 Swiss social workers. The

following sections give insight into the operationalization and measurement of CVM constructs

and the study's sampling strategies.

Measurement

Political Activity. In addition to the definition of political activity above, the construct

consists of complex dimensions of activity, which Verba et al. (1995) classify broadly as high

and low investment activities. High investment activities entail substantial, consistent effort and

commitment of time and material resources over an extended period, whereas low investment

behaviors do not require sustained effort and can be easily completed with nominal time and

other resource expenditure (Serrat, Warburton, Petriwskyj, & Villar, 2018). These concepts

correspond with Rome and Hoechstetter's (2010) instrument measuring political engagement,

the Political Activity Scale (PAS). The 20-item scale was adapted and further developed by

Ostrander, Lane, McClendon, Hayes, and Smith, (2017) and Kindler (2019a; 2019b). The PAS'

"high category" scale was adapted as an *Active Subscale* of behaviors that accord with Verba and

colleague's description of high investment activities, such as contacting an elected official,

working for pay or as a volunteer for a political campaign, participating in political rallies,

marches or protests. The PAS' "low category" scale was adapted to a *Passive Subscale,* that

includes behaviors such as voting on local, state and federal levels, using social media to share

political or civic information, donating money, discussing current policy and boycotting

products. This accords with Verba et al's description of low investment activities.

Participants were asked how often they have participated in each of these types of

activities during the last 12 months, with the following possible responses: never (0), rarely (1),

sometimes (2), often (3), very often (4). For the current study, the PAS was modified to include

only those items which would be understood by both US and Swiss social workers, for a total of

14 items with a score range of 0-56. The Cronbach's Alpha for the entire scale was α=.851. The

Active subscale and Passive subscale each had 7 items with a score range of 0-28, and

Cronbach's alphas were α=.788 and α=.748 respectively.

Political Efficacy. The survey also included standard scales for political efficacy

developed for the American National Election Survey (n.d) (ANES), later refined by Niemi,

Craig, and Mattei (1991) to operationalize internal and external political efficacy using a four-

item scale. Political efficacy refers to one's belief that they are capable of intervening in the

political system (internal efficacy), that the system is capable of responding to their intervention

(external efficacy), and the combination of the two (overall political efficacy). All of the items

measuring this construct have five Likert responses that range from strongly disagree to strongly

agree. The *internal* political efficacy scale, ranging from 0 to 8, included two items: "How well

do you understand the important political issues facing our country?" and "I feel I could do as

good a job in public office as most other people." The *external* political efficacy scale, ranging

from 0 to 8, included two items as well: "How much do public officials care what people like

you think?" and "How much can people like you affect what the government does?" The ANES

scale of internal and external efficacy has been tested for validity and reliability, reporting a

Cronbach's alpha of α=.80 (Niemi, Craig, & Mattei, 1991).

       Political ideology. Freeden (2001) refers to political ideology as "a set of ideas, beliefs,

values, and opinions… that competes deliberately as well as unintentionally over providing plans

of action for public policy making…." (p. 7174). Domhoff (2013) contends that political

ideologies can be placed on a *left* and *right* spectrum or referred to as *liberal* and *conservative* in

US politics. Those falling to the left, or liberal side of the spectrum, tend to dislike hierarchy, be

more oriented toward human needs, focus more on group well-being and social networks, and

are more egalitarian than those on the right side of the ideological spectrum. Those on the right,

or conservative, side of the spectrum find themselves to be individually oriented, believe success

is an individual achievement through individual effort, respect the rule of law and hierarchy, and

are supportive of the social and political power structures. In order to measure the respondents'

political ideology, a 6-point scale was applied. Participants were asked to place themselves on

the scale with 1 indicating a left-wing orientation and 6 indicating a right-wing orientation.

       Recruitment Networks. Involvement in political activity is influenced by civic

organization membership, or recruitment networks per the CVM. These include work, voluntary

and religious organizations. Participants' recruitment networks were assessed through two items

that asked if they were a member of a union and if they were a member of a professional social

work organization, with a yes/no response set.

Sample

In 2017 and 2018, the professional boards of all 50 United States and the District of

Columbia were contacted and a data file including email addresses of social work licensees was

requested. In the end and after multiple inquiries, the following 24 states (approximately 221,327

licensed social workers in total) provided data files: Arkansas, Connecticut, District of

Columbia, Florida, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York,

North Carolina, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, Rhode Island, Utah, Vermont,

Washington, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming. The sample of states are located in all

four regions of the United States (United States Department of Commerce: Economic and

Statistics Administration, United States Census Bureau, n.d.). After cleaning the list of erroneous

email addresses, 133,656 were identified as eligible to participate in the study. Using a random

number generator in Microsoft Excel, one-third of these licensed social workers, or 44,552, were

selected for the sample. These email addresses were organized into panels of 5,000 and every

member of the sample was emailed on four separate occasions between June and October 2018.

Most respondents completed the questionnaire in 15 minutes. Of the 3,033 random selected

individuals who started the survey, 2,350 participants (77%) finished the questionnaire. The

response rate of 7% was calculated after considering the total sample size and the number of

completed responses. When considering only the invitations that were opened, the study's

response rate rises to an estimated 15%.

In Switzerland, social workers don't have the opportunity to get a license. In addition,

there is no reliable data about the actual number of social workers working in the country

(AvenirSocial, 2017), but the number is estimated at about 90,000 (Kindler, 2019a). As a result

of having no list of social workers in Switzerland to work from, random sampling could not be

used as a data collection process. Instead, the questionnaire was distributed through employers,

professional associations, Universities, alumni organizations, Facebook groups and personal

contacts. An estimated 40,000 social workers have received the invitation to participate (Kindler,

2019a). Of the 2245 individuals who started the survey, 1824 participants (81%) finished the

questionnaire between May and July 2018. For the purposes of this article, all students and other

participants who did not hold at least a bachelor's degree in social work have been excluded;

1242 social workers remain in the sample, for an overall response rate of 3%.

In order to compare the political activity and the political attitudes between US (N=3033) and

Swiss social workers (N=1242), both datasets have been merged in the Statistical Package SPSS,

Version 24. For the 4275 participants, the mean age was 46 (M=45.7, SD=14.1) and the sample

was predominantly female (76%). Ninety-eight percent of US social workers are registered to

vote and in Switzerland, where citizenship is the only requirement to vote, 96% in the Swiss

sample are Swiss citizens.

Results

In order to analyze the data collected and to answer the research questions, independent

samples t-tests were conducted to compare the mean scores of US social workers with the mean

scores of Swiss social workers.

Research Question 1 (Resources): Does political activity differ between US and Swiss social workers?

Political Activity Scale. There was a statistically significant difference in overall political

participation measured on the Political Activity Scale (Range 0-56, M=23.0, SD=8.8). US social

workers (*M*=24.2, *SD*=8.5, *n*=2372) have been found to be more politically active than Swiss

social workers (*M*=20.8, *SD*=8.9, *n*=1242), *t*(3612)=11.308, *p*<.001. Fourteen percent of the US

sample can be called often or very often politically active while in the Swiss sample, only 9% of

the respondents can be assigned to this category.

Political Activity on the Active Subscale. There was also a statistically significant

difference in political participation measured on the Active Subscale (Range 0-28, *M*=6.0,

SD=4.8). US social workers (*M*=6.8, *SD*=4.6, *n*=2446) have been found to be more politically

engaged in active behaviors than Swiss social workers (*M*=4.4, *SD*=4.6, *n*=1242),

t(3686)=15.005, *p*<.001. As shown in Table 1, US social workers are more involved than the

Swiss social workers in all seven activities, with the biggest difference being in contacting

politicians. Concerning active political behavior, only 3% of US and only 2% of Swiss social

workers engage often or very often in those kinds of activities.

[Insert Table 1 approximately here]

Political Activity on the Passive Subscale. There was also a statistically significant

difference in political participation measured on the Passive Subscale (Range 0-28, *M*=17.1,

SD=5.0). US social workers (*M*=17.4, *SD*=4.7, *n*=2415) have been found to be more politically

engaged in passive behaviors than Swiss social workers (*M*=16.4, *SD*=5.3, *n*=1242),

t(2246.547)=5.606, *p*<.001. Concerning passive political behavior, Table 2 shows that US social

workers are more involved than the Swiss social workers in all seven activities, with one

exception: Swiss social workers discuss current policy more often than US social workers. Sixty-

three percent of US and 53% of Swiss social workers engage often or very often in those kinds of

activities.

[Insert Table 2 approximately here]

Research question 2 (Engagement): Does political efficacy (internal and external) differ

between US and Swiss social workers?

Both internal (α=.604) as well as external political efficacy (α=.559) were measured with

two items, both ranging from 0 (no efficacy) to 4 (very high efficacy). In the analysis, the two

items were added together so that the new scale ranged from 0 to 8. Overall political efficacy

(α=.541)therefore consisted of these four items with a scale range of 0-16.

Political efficacy. There was a statistically significant difference in overall political

efficacy (Range 0-16, *M*=8.0, *SD*=2.6). US social workers (*M*=8.2, *SD*=2.3, *n*=2762) have been

found to have a higher overall political efficacy than the Swiss group (*M*=7.6, *SD*=3.2, *n*=1242),

t(1851.014)=6.085, p<.001, although 29% of Swiss social workers rate having a strong or very

strong political efficacy compared to 27% of US social workers.

Internal political efficacy. There was a statistically significant difference in internal

political efficacy (Range 0-8, *M*=4.6, *SD*=1.8). US social workers (*M*=4.7, *SD*=1.6, *n*=2779)

have been found to have higher confidence in their ability to intervene in the political system

than the Swiss group (*M*=4.1, *SD*=2.3, *n*=1242), *t*(1805.979)=8.501, *p*<.001. 56% of the US

sample reported a strong or very strong internal political efficacy, while in the Swiss group, only

46% of the respondents can be assigned to this category.

External political efficacy. Concerning external political efficacy (Range 0-8, *M*=3.4,

SD=1.5), an independent sample t-Test has revealed no significant differences between US

(*M*=3.4, *SD*=1.5, *n*=2776) and Swiss social workers (*M*=3.4, *SD*=1.7, *n*=1242),

t(2077.079)=0.105, *p*=.916, although 29% of Swiss social workers rate having a strong or very

strong external political efficacy compared to only 21% of US social workers.

Research question 3 (Engagement): How do US and Swiss social workers identify in terms

of political ideology?

In order to measure the respondents' political ideology, a 6-point scale was applied. Participants

were asked to place themselves on the scale with 1 indicating completely left-wing orientation

and 6 indicating completely right-wing orientation. There was a statistically significant

difference in political ideology of US (*M*=2.5, *SD*=1.1, *N*=2604) and Swiss social workers

(*M*=2.0, *SD*=0.9, *N*=1242), *t*(3032.326)=13.465, *p*<.001. Thirteen percent of the US respondents

placed themselves on the right side, while only 6% of Swiss participants placed themselves on

the right side.

Research question 4 (Recruitment): How do recruitment networks increase political

activity for US and Swiss social workers?

Participants' memberships in recruitment networks were assessed through two items that

asked if they were a member of a union and if they were a member of a professional social work

organization, with a yes/no response set. Seventeen percent of respondents were a member of a

trade union and 37% indicated being a member in a professional social work organization. Swiss

participants were significantly more involved in both networks, $\chi^2(1)$=14.663, *p*<.001, *n*=3610,

CC=.064, *p*<.001.

Both recruitment network types increased the political engagement of social workers

significantly, meaning that social workers belonging to a trade union (*M*=25.4, *SD*=9.3, *n*=578)

were more politically active than social workers without membership in a trade union (*M*=22.6,

SD=8.6, *n*=2904), *t*(783.206)=-6.595, *p*<.001. Also, social workers belonging to a professional

social work association (*M*=25.0, *SD*=8.7, *n*=1521) were more politically active than social

workers without professional association membership (M=21.6, SD=8.6, n=2093), t(3612)=-11.585, p<.001.

Regarding recruitment networks it has been shown that 37% of the total sample are members of a professional social work association and 17% are members of a trade union. Swiss social workers are significantly more often a member in both network types. There is an influence of membership on political participation: Membership in a professional work association increases the political participation of both the US and Swiss subsample. Membership in a trade union increases only the political activity of Swiss social workers, while there is no such significant difference in the US subsample. The connection between professional social work association membership and political activity is the same for US social workers (M_1=23.1, SD_1=8.4, n_1=1459, M_2=26.0, SD_2=8.4, n_2=913, t(2370)=-8.057, p<.001) and Swiss social workers(M_1=18.2, SD_1=8.2, n_1=634, M_2=23.5, SD_2=8.8, n_2=608, t(1221.597)=-11.061, p<.001). However, the connection between trade union membership and political participation differs for the US social worker (M_1=24.2, SD_1=8.3, n_1=1908, M_2=24.8, SD_2=9.3, n_2=332, t(428.565)=-0.990, p=.323) with no significant differences between members and non-members; and for Swiss social workers (M_1=19.5, SD_1=8.3, n_1=996, M_2=26.2, SD_2=9.4, n_2=246, t(344.055)=-10.263, p<.001) where a significant difference exists. This implies that membership in a union influences the political activity of Swiss social workers to a greater extent than their US counterparts.

Limitations

The limitations of this study include the sampling process and size. While the sampling process in the US study has been randomized, the Swiss group consists of a non-probabilistic sample. In addition, the US sample (N=3033) is twice the size of the Swiss sample (N=1242).

While not all US participants answered every question, the Swiss participants were required to

answer all questions in the survey. The second major limitation of this study is the use of a self-

report measure and a moment in time. Also, there may be reliability challenges that could

potentially be attributable to the particular political environment of the 2018 midterm election

when the US survey was administered as well as the concurrent anti-immigrant movement in

Switzerland. Finally, there is a potential limitation in comparing and interpreting the US to

Swiss participants' political participation because of different electoral systems, culture, and

political structures (Norman and Hintze, 2005). Likewise, variation exists in requirements for

social workers to be licensed and in the normative understanding of social work practice. For

example, Switzerland does not require college educated social workers to be licensed or

registered with a governmental entity, and the US has different laws in each state that dictates

who must be licensed.

Discussion

The results of this study show that across both countries, half of the participating social

workers are rarely or never politically active, while just over a third can be described as

sometimes politically active and a mere 12% of participants are often or very often politically

active. Although these results show that the political engagement of social workers can certainly

be increased, comparisons with the overall population suggest that social workers are more

politically active than average citizens (Kindler, 2019a). While there was no significant

difference between Swiss and US social workers' external efficacy, Swiss social workers

reported higher rates of external efficacy, and US social workers reported significantly higher

rates of internal efficacy. Understanding the two countries' outcomes may be related to several

intersecting factors: internal and external efficacy and ideological perspective. For Swiss social

workers, who have higher external efficacy and a more left-leaning ideological view, it would

seem to naturally follow that their internal efficacy would be lower, given that they report being

more expectant of the government to be responsive to the needs of the people, and in a

progressive way. US social workers however, who report a greater internal efficacy, but lower

external efficacy combined with more moderate to conservative political ideology, may see

themselves as needing to be more competent and active in engaging the political system, as they

do not see it as being readily responsive to the needs of the people or themselves in a way that

de-emphasizes marginalization. While these differences exist, it is interesting that social workers

in both countries report higher levels of internal efficacy than external. Civic skills and the

strength of the influence of recruitment networks may be a factor affecting political participation

and efficacy. While social workers reported being a part of a trade union, it was membership in

a professional association that significantly increased political participation of social workers in

both countries. Swiss social workers were significantly more often a member in both network

types, and such membership significantly affected their political participation. This potentially

speaks to a collectivist versus individualist orientation between the two network types in the

United States. Whereas the majority of US social workers are clinical or micro level

practitioners, the support from professional social work organizations reinforces/supports this

orientation in terms of resources and networking opportunities. Trade unions however, defined

primarily by their function of collective bargaining and related advocacy would explain a

connection to political activity and its macro influences/effects (Reisch & Jani, 2012).

　　A comparison between active (range 0-28, M=6.0) and passive political activities (range

0-28, M=17.1) shows a clear preference for passive political activities by social workers in both

countries. These findings confirm the results of Ezell (1993), Domanski (1998), Ostrander

(2017), Kindler (2019a), and others that social workers engage most frequently in political

activities requiring few resources, such as time, money, civic knowledge or public exposure.

This preference may be attributable to individual level factors such as gender. Over three-

quarters of respondents overall were women. As noted in the literature, women tend to view

themselves as being less qualified than men to engage in politics, which tends to be equated with

"high-investment" or "active" political activities. Additionally, because of traditional gender

norms and role expectations, women disproportionately engage in unpaid labor in the home,

leaving them with little time to engage in political activity (Ostrander, Bryan, & Lane, 2019).

This therefore makes "low investment" or "passive" activities more accessible to them. The

ramifications of passive participation are such that while making some political contribution, as a

group, women are still structurally marginalized in terms of policy issues such as the gender

wage gap, a lack of parity with other developed countries in terms of paid family leave, etc.

Implications

Although both the US and Swiss professional codes of ethics explicitly call on social

workers to become politically active, only 12% of the social workers in this study are often or

very often politically active. One implication for the professional associations could be to further

clarify to the members of the profession why political activity should also be part of professional

social work practice. Furthermore, the proportion of respondents who feel little or no

competence to participate in politics is astonishingly high. To address this problem, employers,

professional associations and universities might work intentionally to strengthen the political

efficacy of social workers and social work students. In doing so, social workers can become

involved in more active political behaviors. With their advocacy skills and systems-perspective

approach, they can also contribute to the political system becoming more responsive, thereby

potentially increasing practitioners' external political efficacy. This ripple effect can also be

extended to recruitment networks. With increased active behaviors, and higher levels of internal

and external efficacy, social workers involved in professional associations can influence these

organizations and their membership to increase their involvement in macro-level issues and

movements. In addition, given the significant association between professional association

membership and political participation, encouraging social workers to join a trade union, and

collaborative relationships between professional social work organizations and trade unions may

increase political participation by enhancing civic skills and political efficacy for practitioners.

This article analyzed differences between US and Swiss social workers regarding the

application of the Civic Voluntarism Model and its three components--*resources*, *engagement*,

and *recruitment.* While the model has shown its utility in this and previous studies, as previously

noted, there are some challenges to its ability to adequately explain political participation. Verba

et al.'s conceptualization of high-investment and low-investment activities is problematized by

its limited attention to socio-political power dynamics. Specifically, the model does not take into

account the "cost" of participating in political activity based on one's positionality or social

location or the "cost" of engaging in different forms of political activity. For example, in the

United States, with its long history of disenfranchisement based on race, gender and

socioeconomic status, the "low-investment" or "passive" act of voting can require extensive

resources for people of color, women and low-income individuals (Wang, 2012). With decreases

in the number of polling stations in numerous locales, disproportionate investments of time may

be spent waiting to vote (Salame, 2020), which can also be a financial conundrum for those in

low-income employment, who may have little in the way of paid time off or lack transportation

to engage in political activities (Brady & McNulty, 2011)). Additionally, there may be financial

disenfranchisement resulting from involvement in the penal system, where voting rights are

suspended until legal fees and fines are paid (Sawyer, 2019). For women, whose uncompensated

labor in the home is at two and a half times the rate of men's there is even more of a shortage of

time and money to engage in political activities (UN Women, 2017).

Perhaps as Rubenson (2004) argues, the overall scale of participation in the Civic

Voluntarism Model is problematic. In order to adequately answer the question of why an

individual participates, there needs to be an analysis of the different goals' individuals have

when they engage in political acts and an examination of the choices they make, both choices

between various modes of participation, and choices between who they support. Even if people

possess the resources of time, money, and civic skills they still may be non-participants. These

resources may not be sufficient for participation to take place. In the specific context of an

article comparing US and Swiss social workers, the significant difference suggests perhaps a

need for additional measures to capture the reality of political engagement across populations.

Our research suggests that being often or very often politically active may be attributed to

differences in practitioner social identities and related issue-specific concerns, or identity-

specific inhibiting factors, which may not adequately be captured in the CVM. For example, the

majority of the sample was predominantly white and female in both countries. While respondents

from both countries are likely to live in metropolitan cities with diverse demographics, the recent

socio-political environments have seen white supremacy and xenophobia take center stage in the

political arena prior to the administration of the research studies. In addition, despite overall

diversity in US cities, many residential areas are highly segregated, and Switzerland, which

reports demographics in terms of ethnicity/national origin and considers people of color to be

foreign. According to Rubenson (2004), diversity is a catalyst for political participation, and

operates based on a zero-sum perspective of gains and resource distribution for various identity

groups. In order to strengthen social work practice, additional research in this field--both

domestically and internationally--is needed to better understand and promote political

participation.

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Tables

Table 1
Political Activities on the Active Subscale (Range 0=never to 4=very often)

Active Political Activity	US sample Mean (SD)	Swiss sample Mean (SD)	Total Mean (SD)
Contacted elected official***	1.6 (1.1)	1.0 (1.2)	1.4 (1.1)
Volunteer with interest group***	1.4 (1.1)	1.0 (1.4)	1.2 (1.2)
Participate in political rallies, protests***	1.3 (1.1)	1.0 (1.2)	1.2 (1.1)
Voice opinion to media markets***	1.0 (1.1)	0.5 (1.0)	0.8 (1.1)
Volunteer for a political campaign**	0.8 (1.0)	0.7 (1.1)	0.8 (1.0)
Civil disobedience***	0.6 (0.9)	0.2 (0.7)	0.5 (0.9)
Work for pay for a political campaign***	0.1 (0.5)	0.0 (0.3)	0.1 (0.5)

*** Significant difference at $p<.001$, ** Significant difference at $p=.002$

Table 2
Political Activities on the Passive Subscale (Range 0=never to 4=very often)

Passive Political Activity	US sample Mean (SD)	Swiss sample Mean (SD)	Total Mean (SD)
Vote federal***	3.8 (0.7)	3.3 (1.2)	3.6 (0.9)
Vote state***	3.5 (1.0)	3.3 (1.1)	3.4 (1.0)
Vote local	3.2 (1.1)	3.2 (1.2)	3.2 (1.2)
Discuss current policy***	2.5 (1.0)	3.2 (0.9)	2.7 (1.0)
Boycott products***	2.3 (1.1)	1.5 (1.4)	2.0 (1.2)
Donate money***	1.2 (1.2)	0.9 (1.1)	1.1 (1.2)
Use social media to engage in politics	1.1 (1.2)	1.0 (1.3)	1.1 (1.3)

*** Significant difference at $p<.001$