

Toward International Comparative Research on Associational Activity: Variation in the Form and Focus of Voluntary Associations in Four Nations

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Abstract

This article describes the scope and composition of national associational populations in four similar countries (Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and United States), by way of introducing an important new data release on national associational populations. Special attention is devoted to the subset of associations attending to social inequality issues of gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation, and which are of particular interest to social movement and interest group scholars. No evidence is found for the Tocquevillian notion of heightened national-level associational activity in the United States. The nonmembership associational form is, however, particularly prominent in the United States. Associations attending to social inequality issues in the United Kingdom are structured very differently from these other nations, likely as a result of the unitary nature of government in that country rather than a strong federal system.

Keywords

voluntary associations, social movements, international, national organizational populations, inequality, associations

Membership associations, and the array of closely related associations with professional staffs but no members with which they coexist (i.e., nonmembership groups

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such as the Children's Defense Fund), serve diverse functions and interests, including social, political, hobby, cultural, religious, and occupational based. They perform important theoretical work in sociology and political science alike, being central to the understanding of social capital (Edwards, Foley, & Diani 2001; Putnam, 1995, 2000; Skocpol, 1999, 2003) and fundamental sociological and political processes related to inequality and social change (Edwards & McCarthy 2007; Schattschneider, 1960; Tilly, 1978). These groups are important and effectual as a result of both the size of the largest and most influential organizations (Perrow, 1986, 1992) and the proliferation of numerically large organizational populations (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1989).

But whereas information on commercial establishments, trade unions, and registered political parties is relatively plentiful, the lack of available data for systematic research on the characteristics and dynamics of broad associational populations has been the subject of repeated lament in social movements and interest group literatures (Berry, 1999; Gray & Lowery, 2000; Knoke, 1986; Lowery, 2012; Schlozman & Tierney, 1983; Walker, McCarthy, & Baumgartner, 2011; Walker, 1991). A lack of attention to the characteristics and dynamics of associations is especially apparent in cross-national context (Halpin & Jordan, 2012; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001; Tschirhart, 2006). This article contributes to cross-national comparative research by examining how the incidence of membership associations and closely related non-membership groups varies among four nations (Australia, Canada, United Kingdom, United States).

Data are assembled from national associational directories, from which there is a strong history of data collection in the U.S. social movement and interest group scholarly research (e.g., Baumgartner & Jones, 1993; Johnson & Frickel, 2011; Minkoff, 1995; Nownes, 2004; Walker et al., 2011), as well as in the United Kingdom (e.g., Jordan & Greenan, 2012; Jordan, Baumgartner, McCarthy, Bevan, & Greenan, 2012; Tilanus 1986) and Canada (e.g., Abelson & Carberry, 1998; Greenberg & Walters, 2004; Handy, Mook, & Quarter 2008; Quarter, Sousa, Richmond, & Carmichael, 2001). Despite the number of publications drawing from these sources, difficulties in accessing data have previously limited their use to analysis of single organizational populations within single nations (but see Jordan et al., 2012). In order to facilitate further research, all data used herein are made publicly available on the Comparative National Associations Project (CNAP) website (associationsproject.org).

This research contributes to understanding the form and function of broad associational populations in different societies. Building on the observations of Tocqueville, I begin by asking if the population of the U.S. national associations is dense relative to other similar nations (Canada, United Kingdom, and Australia). I then ask if the proportion of nonmembership associations is particularly high in the United States, relative to these other nations. Previous research has established that between one quarter and 40% of U.S. national policy-active associations, those groups engaged in significant and sustained political-influence activities and commonly referred to as social movement organizations (SMOs) or interest groups, contain no members (Minkoff, Aisenbrey, & Agnone 2008; Walker et al., 2011). Analyses conclude with a comparison of the size and spatial patterning of national associations in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Throughout the article, I pay special attention to contextualizing the relative size and shape of organizational populations which are focused on major sources of social inequality (race; gender; Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender [LGBT] status). The decision to focus on this particular subset of organizations was made for three reasons. First, the race, gender, and LGBT associational fields represent some of the largest sectors of citizens advocacy groups. Second, this subset of membership and closely affiliated nonmembership associations is relevant to a variety of central sociological and political science questions about how inequality and social change are produced; such as the extent to which formal interest group populations serve to amplify preexisting individual-level inequalities (Schattschneider, 1960; Schlozman, Verba, & Brady, 2012), how such groups are variously integrated into political systems, and efficacy questions about how associational infrastructures can be variously arranged to advocate social change for disadvantaged populations (Gamson, 1990; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Minkoff, 1995; Oberschall, 1993). Finally, this focus reflects the centrality of U.S. race, gender, and (to a lesser degree) LGBT “rights” movements (King, Bentele, & Soule, 2007; Skrentny, 2002) in empirical and theoretical social movements literatures. The dominant resource mobilization and political-process approaches to studying social movements were developed in the United States to help explain the emergence of these new and enduring movements in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as contemporaneous but more short-lived antiwar and free speech movements (Jenkins, 1983; Jenkins & Eckert, 1986; McAdam, 1982; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Morris, 1984; Taylor, 1989). By featuring these groups prominently in analyses, I am able to contextualize the size and pattern of organization among this important field within the broader organizational milieu in which it operates.

America: A Nation of Joiners?

The understanding of American associational activity is foregrounded by the observation of Alexis De Tocqueville in 1835 (1961) that Americans “of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions” are compelled to “constantly form associations.” This statement has been the subject of considerable within-nation analysis which shows that, indeed, most Americans join associations (see e.g., Babchuk & Booth, 1969; Rotolo, 1999). Research examining individual propensity for joining associational groups in the United States has often been framed as a longitudinal question, with the assertion that associational memberships have declined in America a subject of particularly lively debate (Putnam, 1995, 2000; Rotolo, 1999; Paxton, 1999). Surprisingly little research has assessed the inherently cross-national, comparative, element of Tocqueville’s statement in that context however.

What cross-national research there is finds the notion of America as a nation of joiners to be considerably overblown. Liberal democracies and nations with high levels of economic development have higher rates of associational joining (Curtis, Douglas, & Grabb, 2001; Curtis, Grabb, & Douglas, 1992; Schofer & Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001). This is not uniquely true for the United States however. Indeed, when religious activity is removed from membership estimates, the United States actually has somewhat lower rates of joining than many other Western industrialized

nations, including Canada (Curtis et al., 1992; Curtis et al., 2001). At the individual level, Americans are not exceptional for their participation in voluntary groups.

These individual-level findings test Tocqueville's statement only indirectly, however, as his assertion is pitched not at the level of individual joining but the organizational level where Tocqueville claims that Americans are particularly likely to "form associations." Americans may be no more likely than citizens in other Western democracies to participate in associations, but may still form organizations at higher rates than other nations. This would imply an organizational field that is comparatively large numerically, and characterized by organizations of relatively small size. Understanding the distribution of associational fields is important not just for what it tells us about these organizations themselves, but because these groups are important to understanding individual participation. It is *organizations* that provide opportunities to act, and create *demand* for action (McCarthy & Zald, 1977). Just as being asked to attend a rally is the single biggest predictor of doing so (McPhail & Miller, 1973), so to are individual-level volunteering (Rotolo & Wilson, 2012) and charitable giving (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011) influenced by the size and activities of the nonprofit organizational sector creating not just opportunities, but demand for action. These groups create an awareness of need and make direct solicitations (e.g., through flyers in the mail, canvassing, and requests that draw on members personal work and friendship networks) that are important elements in eliciting individual action.

While individual joining activity may be declining in the United States, it is generally accepted that the United States has a particularly large field of civic associations to potentially make demands for action. Certainly, the overall number of interest groups in the United States overwhelms populations in other Western democracies, and there was an "explosion" of national advocacy-organization building in the United States during the 1970s (Walker, 1991; Jordan et al., 2012). These apparently countervailing trends of declining individual engagement and increased associational activity are, in part, explained by the rise of professionally driven associations (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Walker et al., 2011).

Professionalized organizations are different in important ways from traditional membership associations, however, a critical point in literatures on civic and social-capacity building as well as social movement and interest groups. Skocpol (1999, 2003) and Putnam (1995, 2000), in particular, have suggested that the shift toward professionalized and nonmembership groups has been a major cause of declining social capital in the United States. Research on advocacy organizations in Washington DC indicates that one quarter contain no members (Minkoff et al., 2008) while a recent assessment of national advocacy organizations more broadly (not just those located in DC) suggests the percentage of associations without members has fluctuated between 29% and 39% since the 1960s (Walker et al., 2011).¹ As with research at the individual level, however, research on associational populations has focused on longitudinal questions at the expense of cross-national comparison. Moreover, research focused on citizens advocacy groups examines only one small piece of a much larger membership associational landscape. This article presents data on the wide range of national associational populations in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

Employing this broader, and very rare, cross-national perspective, Jordan et al. (2012) show that a narrow focus on policy-active groups obscures our understanding of the broader associational landscape. They confirm the notion of rapid growth in U.S. interest groups during the 1970s and to a lesser extent the 1980s, while also showing there is no evidence of the commonly presumed simultaneous interest group “explosion” within the United Kingdom. Rather, the total population of UK membership groups has remained fairly stable in terms of overall size, while important underlying dynamic processes of organizational births *and deaths* have resulted in some compositional change. Primarily, there has been a decline in the proportion of trade groups among associations.

Surprisingly little other empirical work has studied broad associational communities in a cross-national comparative perspective. What work there is has focused almost exclusively on international organizations and national membership in or chapters of these groups, with data coming primarily from the *Yearbook of International Organizations* (Beckfield, 2010, 2003; Boli & Thomas, 1997; Smith & Wiest, 2005). This has made for compelling research on how international civic associations contribute to the structure of a world polity and how the structure of groups contributes to either reproducing or changing transnational inequalities in power. These data tell us little about comparative conditions for membership groups within each nation, however, as groups with international memberships are just one small part of the larger Canadian, Australian, or the U.S. associational community.

In the analyses to follow, I ask first if the density of U.S. national civic associations is greater than other similar nations (Jepperson, 2002) on a per capita basis. Second, I compare rates of nonmembership associational activity across nations. Analyses conclude with an examination of the relative size and spatial patterning of national associations in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom. I highlight across all analyses a subset of organizations attending to major sources of social inequality (race/ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation) in order to contextualize how this important family of “rights” organizations compares to national associational populations more generally. Given the centrality of inequality-focused movements in the U.S. literature, I expect these powerful special interests to be especially numerous in the United States.

Method

Studies of broad organizational populations are rare, with the case study approach instead dominating both social movement organization (Andrews & Edwards, 2004, p. 483) and interest group (Baumgartner & Leech, 1998, pp. 175-176) literatures. This has resulted in detailed knowledge of organizing patterns in particular movements or issue areas, such as the U.S. peace, civil rights, womens, LGBT, and environmental protection. A complimentary approach moves beyond the organizational or even organizational population level to greater levels of aggregation, and compares across populations or clusters of related organizational populations, what social-movement [organizational] scholars term social movement “sectors” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977) or

“families.” The focus on organizational dynamics at a more macro level provides both context for case studies and a different analytic lens (Minkoff, 2002).

As a source of data on the broad range of associations in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom, I rely on independently assembled, but comparable, associational directories developed in each nation and patterned after the United States *Encyclopedia of Associations* (EOA), *Volume 1, National Organizations of the U.S.*. Published since 1956 by Gale Research, annually since 1974, the EOA is a standard source of data in sociology and political science alike for bounding populations of U.S. national associations (see reviews in Andrews, Hunter, & Edwards, 2012; Johnson & Frickel, 2011; Martin, Baumgartner, & McCarthy, 2005). Clearly the EOA, or any single data source, cannot provide a comprehensive listing of associations. Previous research shows the EOA is biased toward overrepresenting the largest and most well-known organizations of any type, as well as those located in/near a nation’s capital city (Andrews et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2005; Minkoff 1995). These biases likely persist across nations. The EOA is, however, the most representative source of over-time information available on broad ranges of national associations (Andrews et al., 2012; Martin et al., 2005).

Like the EOA, directories of national associations in each country publish demographic information and brief descriptions of organizational purpose on what is generally seen as a fairly representative range of national nonprofit associations.² These are the *Directory of British Associations & Associations in Ireland* (CBD Research, 2000), the *Directory of Australian Associations* (Crown Content, 2004) and *Associations Canada* (Canadian Almanac & Directory 2000). United Kingdom (Jordan et al., 2012; Jordan & Greenan, 2012; Tilanus, 1986) and Canadian (Abelson & Carberry, 1998; Greenberg & Walters, 2004; Handy et al., 2008; Mook, Handy, & Quarter, 2007; Quarter et al., 2001) scholars have similarly drawn from their national directories in sampling the types of groups of interest here.

One of the largest problems with these data sources has been one of access, and the difficulty in working with them. Until recently data were available only in published physical book format. Even when electronic records are kept, yearly observations are not always readily available (especially over a period of time). It is difficult to extract and assemble information from directories sometimes published alphabetically, sometimes by editor assigned keywords (which themselves change over a period of time), and other times alphabetically by geographic region. Further complicating matters are numerous idiosyncrasies such as the Australian Directory including multiple listings for many organizations.³

Here, I employ cross-sectional information assembled from complete single directories in Canada, Australia, and Britain for the year 2000, the only year for which I have complete and reasonably clean data.⁴ To gather these data I apply novel methods of data assembly. Each hard copy directory was scanned and digitized, using Optical Character Recognition software to construct text files. A custom built “Directory Extractor” computer program was then used to identify and convert manifest content from these .txt files into a functional Microsoft Excel database using regular expressions. Every entry in the directories was automatically recorded, along with manifest

content contained therein, including: entry #, organization name, and basic demographic information (e.g., founding date, number of members, budget).

Undergraduate RAs (Research Assistants), trained and supervised by the author, acted as frontline coders reading through every entry to identify any organizations for which membership or organizational goals were substantially associated with race/ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation (what I combine together as “inequality issues” for analysis) along with veterans issues, issues of the aged, religion, or the environment (not used in analyses show here). In coding the membership structure of organizations, what we can call the organizational repertoire (McCarthy & Walker, 2004), procedures employed by the Policy Agendas Project in coding of “public affairs” associations from the U.S. EOA and detailed in Walker et al. (2011) are adopted. The primary category of interest, nonmembership organizations, was coded as such if an organization listed no membership numbers and referenced no membership base in the description and included a descriptor such as foundation, institute, center, committee, fund, campaign, program, project, conference, department, task force, or mission. Organizations were coded as having individual members if the dues structure, textual description, or organizational name made clear that individuals were members (by referencing e.g., “citizens,” “professionals,” “teachers,” etc.).⁵ Organizations were coded as having organizational members based upon the same criteria (with organizational name keywords including things like “firms,” “companies,” “schools,” or “corporations.”). For a small number of groups, a combined individual-organizational membership basis was identified. Finally, organizations for which membership could not be clearly determined were coded as “don’t know.” All analyses that follow include only those groups for which a membership basis could be clearly determined.

Associations were coded as focused on major dimensions of inequality if their membership or associational goals were substantially associated with a specific gender, race/ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This was established through an examination of textual descriptions, keywords, and organizational names.⁶ One notable difference across directories, in addition to the specific numeric information available on things like budget or staff, is that the Directory of British Associations & Associations in Ireland typically provides single sentence free-text organizational descriptions and/or summaries of purpose, while the other directories provide short paragraph descriptions. This means a comparative reduction in the amount of qualitative detail available for content analysis on specific issues of concern in Britain relative to the other nations. While the detail available on issues is somewhat limited, name and keywords alone are enough to code a primary issue of interest in the majority of cases, and even single sentences provide enough information to do so in nearly all instances.

A summary of available features and some potential issues of comparability in the amount and type of information available across sources is presented in Table 1.⁷ For each piece of information dependent on human coders at least two (usually three) trained coders independently coded information and, whenever there was a disagreement, a graduate student assistant and/or the author reviewed and adjudicated the coding. Inter-coder reliability measures at the initial stage of coding were acceptable at

Table 1. Information Available for Analysis Across Various National Directories.

	Organization name	Keyword	Textual description	Found. date	Location	Members
Australia	x	x	x	x	x	x
Britain	x		x	x	x	x
Canada	x	x	x	x	x	x
United States	x	x				

	Publication	Conferences	Affiliations	Chapters	Membership structure	Issues
Australia	x		x	x	x	x
Britain	x	x	x	x	x	x
Canada	x	x	x	x	x	x
United States					x	x

well over 90% agreement for each national directory and each measure of membership structure and issues. Cohen’s kappa measures were also above .8 in all instances.

A key component of group strength is the amount of resources available. More resourceful organizations are generally seen as more effective at mobilizing constituencies and advocating political interests (Edwards & McCarthy 2007). With any given amount of resources the relevant interest population may be organized in a diversity of ways, however. It may have a large and diverse population of organizations like the U.S. environmental movement (Andrews & Edwards, 2005; Johnson 2008; McLaughlin & Khawaja, 2000) or a highly centralized peak organization as with gun rights (the National Rifle Association [NRA]). I attend to these two primary dimensions of size in the populations under study, the total numbers/proportions of organizations substantially interested in relevant topics (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1989) and the resources available to each individual organization (Perrow, 1992). Data limitations restrict analyses of individual-organizational resource capacity to the cases of Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom.

In addition to examining the distribution of organizational forms and the modal size of individual organizations, I attend to geographic location of national associational headquarters. The location of organizational headquarters in the national capital city, or somewhat broader Australian Capital Territory, is conceptualized as a measure of proximity to national policymakers, and thus the perceived relevance of national politics for an organization (Minkoff et al., 2008; Schlozman et al., 2012).

Results

Initial results compare the total number, or density, of national associations in a test of the claim that the United States has exceptionally high rates of associational formation. This first set of results also assesses the proportion of national associations

Table 2. Density of Associations and Inequality-Focused Associations in the United States, Canada, Australia, and Canada.

	USA	CANADA	AUSTRALIA	UK
Population in 2000 (millions)	283.23	30.76	19.14	59.42
Total National Associations	22,473	3,621	2,410	7,221
Associations per million population	79	118	126	122
National inequality groups	1,949	299	267	204
Percentage of all groups inequality	8.7	8.3	11.1	2.8
Inequality groups per million people	6.9	9.7	14	3.4
% all groups nonmembership		14.4	14.3	21.7
% inequality groups nonmembership		16.5	20.4	22.5

possessing a nonmembership organizational structure. A second set of analyses then examines the relative size and spatial patterning of associational populations for the countries on which data is available. I pay special attention to associations focused on issues related to major sources of social inequality (race, gender, sexual orientation) throughout.

Cross-national Comparison of the Incidence and Prevalence of Nonmembership Form

To assess how the overall size of associational populations compares across nations, Table 2 lists the national population in 2000 for each country under observation, the total number of national associations for each country, and the number of national associations per capita. The population of more than 22,000 national associations in the United States is larger on an order of magnitude than in Australia, Canada, or the United Kingdom. These numbers highlight differences in scale between the United States and the other nations under study.

On a per capita basis the rate of national associations is actually *lower* in the United States than all three of the other nations examined, however. Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom each have roughly 120 national associations per million population, the United States a comparatively low 79. It may be that, in such a geographically large and demographically diverse nation as the United States, greater densities of associations exist at the subnational level than in other nations. However, at the national level at least, this study offers no support for the Touquevilian notion of the United States as a particular hotbed of associational activity.

Counts and rates of associations that attend to issues related to race/ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation are presented in the middle portion of Table 2. The patterns

displayed are striking. Again, the population of relevant groups in the United States is larger than the other nations under analysis by an order of magnitude. While more than 8% of organizations in Canada and the United States and 11% in Australia are inequality based, however, less than 3% of civic associations in the United Kingdom are composed of or focused on issues based around racial, gender, or sexual orientation. The likely explanation for this stark difference is that Australia, Canada, and the United States are all nations of immigrants, as well as having significant populations of indigenous peoples, and are thus more likely to organize around race/ethnicity issues. Indeed, breaking down this inequality category, the largest discrepancy is among the racial subset of organizations. The same pattern of results persists, if less dramatically, across gender and sexual orientation based groups as well however (analyses not shown).

The bottom portion of Table 2 shows the distribution of the nonmembership organizational form across national associational fields. These data suggest the United States does have a particularly large proportion of nonmembership professional organizations that coexists with individual membership associations. Between 25% and 39% of U.S. policy-active groups have professional staffs with no individual members (Minkoff et al., 2008; Walker et al., 2011). For Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom between 16% (Canada) and 22% (United Kingdom) of inequality associations, groups particularly likely to engage in national-level politics, adopt a nonmembership form.

Size and Spatial Patterning of Australian, Canadian, and UK Associations

Membership associations are important *both* because of the proliferation of numerically large organizational populations (Hannan & Freeman, 1977, 1989) and because of the sheer size of the most influential organizations (Perrow, 1992). In other words, in determining how effective organizational populations are likely to be (at policy influence, developing social capital, or whatever), it is necessary to examine both the total number of relevant organizations and the resource capacity of typical organizations. Unfortunately, measures of size were not recorded for the U.S. case⁸ necessarily limiting comparisons to the other three nations under study. Figure 1 shows the median number of individual members in Australian, Canadian, and UK national associations.

In Canada and the United Kingdom both general associational populations and inequality groups have median individual memberships of around 500 people. In Australia (where inequality associations are most numerous on a per capita basis), inequality associations claim individual memberships about one half the size of the median national association. Australia has the largest proportion of inequality groups, but these groups are relatively small compared to the median association in the country.

Examination of the location of associational headquarters in Figure 2 suggests a much more centralized community of nonprofit associations in the UK relative to the

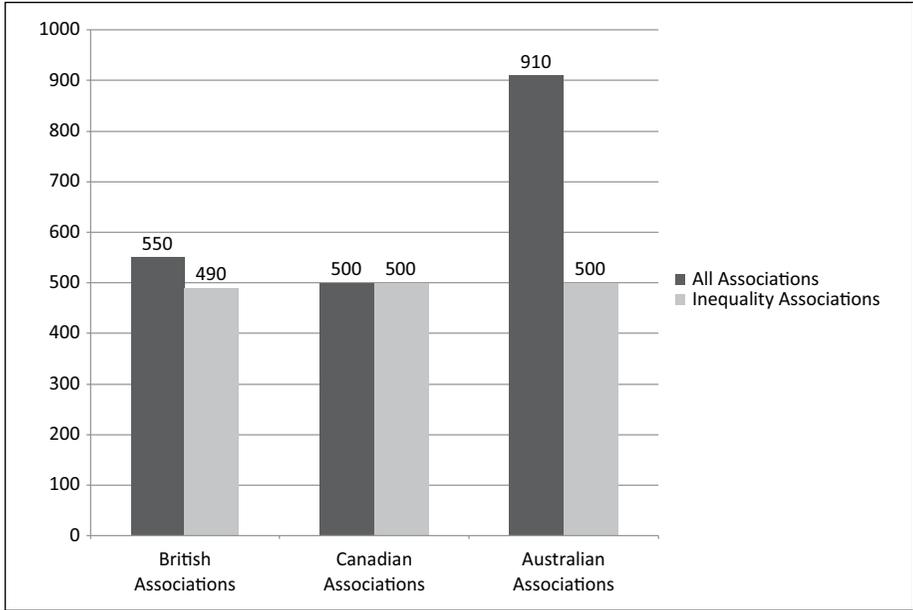


Figure 1. Median individual memberships by nation and associational focus.

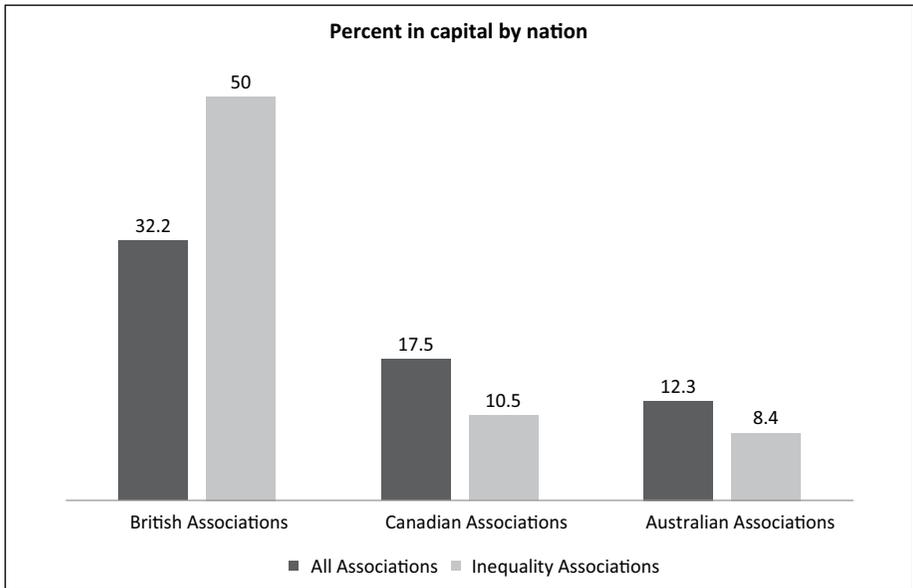


Figure 2. Percent of associations with headquarters in national capital by nation and associational focus.

other nations. Almost one third of all national associations in the United Kingdom are located in London, and fully 50% of inequality-focused associations are headquartered in the capital. These percentages are considerably lower in Canada, and lowest in Australia where only 12% of national associations and 8% of inequality-focused associations are located in the Australian Capital Territory. These findings suggest important differences in the way nonprofit associations generally, and social movements in particular, are structured within Western democratic nations. They are also a striking reminder of the importance of political institutions. The more numerically dense and geographically diverse, but resource small, pattern of national organizations seen in Australia, and to a lesser extent Canada, occur within federated political systems. In such systems, subnational governments play larger roles, with territories being especially strong in Australia. In the United Kingdom, a unitary political system is echoed in a more centralized associational field, especially among policy-active inequality-focused associations.

Discussion/Conclusion

This research assesses the relative abundance of national membership and nonmembership associations in four nations. It is often assumed that the United States is a nation of particularly high levels of associational activity. While the United States is considerably larger than the other nations under study, and thus has a substantially larger total population of national associations, I find the national associational population is considerably *less* dense in the United States on a per capita basis than the other nations under study. This cross-national comparison also shows that staff driven, nonmembership associations are more prevalent in both absolute and proportional terms in the United States than they are in other similar countries. These findings support individual-level research (Curtis et al., 1992; Curtis et al., 2001) that calls into question the Tocquevillian notion of the United States as a particular hotbed of associational activity.

I further find that, even among four relatively similar nations (Jepperson, 2002), there is marked diversity in the structure of associational populations generally and between populations of inequality-focused groups in particular. The United Kingdom is distinct for having markedly lower proportions of groups focused on inequality issues overall, and race/ethnicity issues in particular. The UK associations, and inequality-focused groups especially, are also much more likely to be located in the nation's capital. These distinctive elements of the UK associational population are likely a function of the more unitary political system in that nation. The other nations in this study have federal systems with two distinct levels of government (Federal and state or provincial). Australia, with a highly decentralized political system and associational population stands in marked contrast to the UK Skocpol (Skocpol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000) has demonstrated the importance of political systems in influencing the way in which social movement organizations themselves are structured. These findings reinforce the central role of political systems in structuring civic associational structures more generally as, even within comparable parliamentary democracies, the differences in centralization are striking.

Implications For Practitioners

This research is focused at a fairly high level of abstraction, but relevant implications for practitioners can still be drawn (Bushhouse & Sowa, 2012). Patterns of organizing across nations may provide important clues about how to most productively establish working partnerships cross-nationally. It may be relatively easy for those focused on racial/ethnic, gender or LGBT issues to identify potential collaborative partners in the particularly “flat” and abundant (and presumably diverse) associational field in Australia, for instance. This is true especially as compared to the United Kingdom, where inequality groups are both relatively uncommon and highly centralized.

Strategies for organizing which work well in one national context may not readily transfer even to what are culturally similar nations, however. The centralized nature of the British national associational field, where so many groups are headquartered in the capital near sources of political power, suggests greater ease of potential coordination at the national and even international levels. A national campaign in Australia would seem to require considerably greater efforts of coordination and partnering with associations on a broad geographic basis.

Data also hint at a number of features of the job market for those working in the not-for-profit associational world. The sheer magnitude of the U.S. associational universe (almost twice the total number of national associations listed in the U.S. national associational directory as in Canada, Australia, and the United Kingdom combined) suggests a particularly large, well developed, and diverse national professional job market. That significant minorities of national associations adopt a nonmembership structure in all four of the nations examined here also suggests that a career in the voluntary sector is probably more likely to include stints (or entire careers) within nonmembership organizations than most people would presume. This is particularly the case within the United States.

The skills necessary for practitioners may be somewhat different across nations as well. The centralized nature of the British associational system suggests a job market that preferences the skills necessary to work with governmental bureaucracies. Australia’s population of very small and distributed national associations implies the existence of considerably lower barriers to population entry (and exit). Intrepid organizational entrepreneurs should feel emboldened to action in some national contexts, and more wary of potential barriers to entry (at least at the national level) in others.

Future Research

Substantively, this research raises many more questions than it answers, and I conclude by addressing some of these. First, results presented here are unable to speak to subnational associational capacity or membership activity, which likely differs significantly from the national level (Andrews & Edwards, 2005) and may reasonably be expected to be more robust within the United States than the other nations under study.

Comparative study of associational activity at subnational levels may be one fruitful avenue of future research.

Second, an obvious follow-up question raised by this research is: what is more efficacious in effecting political and/or social change—the more diverse and less centralized organizational fields that exist in Australia, or the more centralized organizational fields of Britain? This has been an active research subject in U.S. social movement literature (Gamson, 1990; Olzak & Ryo, 2007; Johnson, 2008). Cross-national perspectives could provide insights in theorizing how movements best exert effects, and how such activities “fit” with political environments (Amenta, Caren, & Olasky, 2005).

Third, we know increasingly more about the relative distribution of membership and nonmembership organizational forms within the United States (Walker et al., 2011) and across nations, but have failed to assess questions about either the resource capacity or effectiveness across form. Future research should examine if membership or nonmembership organizations garner greater amounts of resources and if the relative size of membership versus nonmembership groups has changed appreciably over time. Future research could also profitably examine the extent to which activities are divided within the associational universe according to these structural characteristics. Is it the case, for example, that nonmembership associations are more likely to perform scientific research or lobbying activities and membership associations more likely to participate in direct action or service work (e.g., organizing protests or volunteer labor)?

This article presents a unique cross-national comparative analysis of membership (and closely related nonmembership) associations in four nations. Substantive findings are of interest in their own right, but this article also serves as an introduction to a new source of comparable data on national associations that may be of use to a variety of scholars for addressing the research questions posed above, among others. There is sufficient quality and detail of information available to conduct analyses relying exclusively on these associational data, as is done here. More promisingly, data can be matched with information on, for example, national public policy, media, and public opinion to potentially conduct a wide variety of analyses.

Finally, analysts can use the supplied national datasets to draw sampling frames for further analysis, or combine data with other “peak lists” (see Andrews et al., 2012) to assemble more complete information on organizational populations. More broadly, this research contributes to a larger scholarly conversation about how best to define relevant cases for analysis (Ragin and Becker 1992), or in other words, how to operationalize associational populations of interest, and the usefulness of associational directories in particular for bounding purposes (Halpin & Jordan, 2012; Johnson & Frickel, 2011, appendix A; Martin et al., 2005). In order to facilitate future research, all data used in these analyses are made publicly available on the Comparative National Associations Project (CNAP) website (associationsproject.org). It is hoped that similar practice by other associational scholars will lead to a flourishing of comparative cross-national research that are complementary to analyses focused on specific national contexts.

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Notes

1. Both of these studies find that an additional 10% of national associations contain organizational members only. Of the remaining 50% to 65% of national advocacy organizations in the United States which contain individual members, the vast majority do so exclusively. Walker et al. (2011) find that roughly 10% of national advocacy associations contain both individual and organizational members, while nearly half contain individual members only.
2. The U.S. EOA includes subnational groups in a separate directory and the Canadian directory includes a code for scope of operations allowing for easy identification of national groups. For the Australian and UK cases all groups whose name or organizational description indicates the organization operates in a single city, province, or region were removed prior to analysis. This includes groups operating exclusively in Scotland, Wales, or Ireland.
3. Out of 5,423 total entries in the Directory of Australian Associations, only 4,559 represented unique organizations (Nearly half of these, 2,149, were removed prior to analysis because of a subnational focus).
4. Australian data come from the 2004 edition of the Directory of Australian Associations. I was at the mercy of directory availability in selecting specific years for analysis as early efforts to convert print directories into electronic database format required their physical destruction, and it was thus necessary to purchase directories as available on the used book market. The Directory of Australian Associations is the only directory published on a more than annual basis, and as such is typically treated as a magazine rather than a book. As a result, old copies are rarely available. I am in the midst of adopting nondestructive book-scanning technology that expands opportunities for this research, and the development of over-time analyses.
5. The Directory of British Associations is unique in not listing an associations total membership, but disaggregating between members that are "individuals," "firms," and

- “organizations.” While this improves the reliability and validity of coding for membership structure, this directory is also unique in that it includes no associations that do not have members. The editor instead lists such groups instead in a companion directory of Centres, Bureaux & Research Institutes. Information from this companion directory is included in this study.
6. Coding for the U.S. EOA necessarily relied on a combination of organizational names and keywords only, and thus slightly underestimates the number of groups focused on inequality issues.
 7. Data from the U.S. EOA are now available through the Policy Agendas Project website: <http://www.policyagendas.org/>. Unfortunately, much of the manifest information available in the U.S. EOA on, for example, budgets and organizational headquarter location were unable to be assembled because the cost was too great given the reliance on human coders. Information from all other directories was assembled by the author.
 8. See Note 7.

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