

# Associational Participation and Political Involvement in Macau: A Path Analysis

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*This article employs a path model analysis to test a mobilization version of social participation theory in the context of a non-Western society, Macau. Our study represents an advance on previous work because we compare the relative importance of civic skills and political interest in transmitting the effects of associational life to political participation. We find that, as in the West, voluntary organizations in non-Western societies act as "schools of democracy" in which individuals acquire civic skills and become more interested in politics. There is no direct causal relationship between associational participation and political involvement; the effects of associational participation on political involvement are mediated through civic skills and political interest, with the former playing a bigger role as a mediator.*

**KEYWORDS:** political participation; associational life; social participation theory; path analysis; Macau.

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The socializing capacity of civic organizations in promoting political activism has been well studied in mature or newly established democracies. Associational participation has an impact on the level of political participation of citizens, with participatory orientations such as civic skills and political interest acting as mediating factors. However, few studies have focused on examining this politicizing mechanism in contexts other than those of well-established Western democracies. This paper has three aims: first, to test whether voluntary organizations in a non-Western society also serve as "schools of democracy" in which members become more interested in politics and acquire civic skills; second, to examine whether the effect of associational participation on political involvement is mediated through participatory orientations developed within organizations; and third, to ascertain the relative importance of these participatory orientations in transmitting the effects of associational participation to political involvement. By doing so, we hope to fill a gap in the literature on the political consequences of voluntary organizations in a non-Western context.

Leighley points out that the political socialization effects of voluntary associations vary depending on the political opportunity structure within nation-states.<sup>1</sup> This echoes Tocqueville's view that the relationship between associational participation and political engagement was stronger in early nineteenth century America than it was in Europe because American society was more democratic, less bureaucratic and more decentralized than European society. As a result, voluntary associations in the United States exhibited stronger political socialization effects than their European counterparts as U.S. associations had more room to maneuver and could participate more in the political system.<sup>2</sup> Before delving into the political participation literature, a brief overview of the political environment in

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<sup>1</sup>Jan E. Leighley, "Attitudes, Opportunities and Incentives: A Field Essay on Political Participation," *Political Research Quarterly* 48, no. 1 (March 1995): 187-88, 191.

<sup>2</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* (London: Penguin Classics, 2003), ix-xlvi.

Macau before and after the handover to China in late 1999 is in order.

Macau was a Portuguese colony for four hundred years. During the colonial period, the overwhelming majority of Macau's population (96 percent) was Chinese, but they were systematically excluded from the political system due to language and cultural barriers.<sup>3</sup> After the signing of the Sino-Portuguese Joint Declaration in April 1987, Macau began a process of transformation from a Portuguese colony into a Special Administrative Region (SAR) of the People's Republic of China. The return of sovereignty to China enhanced a sense of belonging and identity among the Chinese population and they became more interested in politics and exhibited a higher level of political efficacy. Meanwhile, the Macau SAR government introduced a more responsive and accountable administration that included formal and informal consultations as well as open forums or public hearings on political and social issues in an effort to encourage the people of Macau to participate in the decision-making process.<sup>4</sup> Retrocession to China has therefore substantially expanded the people's opportunities for and interest in political participation. Since the handover in December 1999, political participation in Macau has increased substantially, and elections and group activities have become the two new forms of political participation in the SAR.<sup>5</sup>

The issue of associational membership is of particular interest in Macau since it has a high density of voluntary associations. In 2010, there were more than 4,629 registered associations for a population of approximately 540,000, and the number keeps increasing.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the political ecology of Macau is commonly referred to as "social group

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<sup>3</sup>Herbert S. Yee, "Mass Political Culture in Macau: Continuity and Change," *Issues & Studies* 35, no. 2 (June 1999): 183-84.

<sup>4</sup>Somy S. H. Lo and Herbert S. Yee, "Legitimacy-Building in the Macau Special Administrative Region: Colonial Legacies and Reform Strategies," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 13, no. 1 (2005): 51-79.

<sup>5</sup>C. S. Bryan Ho, "Political Culture, Social Movements, and Governability in Macau," *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 38, no. 2 (2011): 59-87.

<sup>6</sup>This figure was obtained by counting the number of registered associations listed in the government gazette.

politics"<sup>7</sup> or "associational politics." We surmise that Macau's civic associations may function as schools of democracy where citizens hone their civic skills and develop an interest in politics, which would lead to increased political participation.

### **Relationship between Associational Participation and Political Involvement**

The existence of a positive relationship between associational participation and political involvement in numerous Western countries has been confirmed in the political participation literature. For instance, in their exemplary study, Almond and Verba show that there is a positive association between organizational participation and overall political participation across the five nations they investigate.<sup>8</sup> A positive and moderately strong relationship between associational participation and voter turnout is also found in the case of the United States.<sup>9</sup> Other studies invariably find that political activities, such as discussing politics, attending meetings, and contacting politicians or government officials, are all associated with involvement in voluntary organizations in mature or newly established democracies even after controlling for socioeconomic status or political orientation.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the impact of participation in voluntary organiza-

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<sup>7</sup>Herbert S. Yee, *Macau in Transition: From Colony to Autonomous Region* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 159.

<sup>8</sup>Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1963).

<sup>9</sup>Marvin E. Olsen, "Social Participation and Voting Turnout: A Multivariate Analysis," *American Sociological Review* 37, no. 3 (June 1972): 317-33.

<sup>10</sup>See, for example, Bonnie Erickson and T. A. Nosanchuk, "How an Apolitical Association Politicizes?" *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 27 (May 1990): 206-19; David L. Rogers, Gordon L. Bultena, and Ken H. Barb, "Voluntary Association Membership and Political Participation: An Exploration of the Mobilization Hypothesis," *Sociological Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (Summer 1975): 305-18; Amber L. Seligson, "Civic Association and Democratic Participation in Central America," *Comparative Political Studies* 32, no. 3 (May 1999): 342-62; Dietlind Stolle and Thomas R. Rochon, "Are All Associations Alike? Member Diversity, Associational Type, and the Creation of Social Capital," *American Behavioral Scientist* 42, no. 1 (September 1998): 47-65; Sidney Verba and Norman H.

tions on political activism is not moderated by the size, nature, or activity level of the voluntary association.<sup>11</sup> Instead, political activity is found to be strongly associated with membership of voluntary associations of all kinds,<sup>12</sup> and that joining even nonpolitical organizations helps foster a competent citizenry.<sup>13</sup> It seems that what matters is the number of voluntary associations to which an individual is affiliated, not the type of organization or the individual's activity level within it. In sum, the effect of joining voluntary organizations is cumulative, in that people who join more than one organization are more politically active than those who are only affiliated to one, regardless of their level of activity within the organization.<sup>14</sup> However, studies on the politicizing mechanism of voluntary organizations are less than conclusive in the sense that not all generic associational involvements lead to enhanced political activity. In order for active involvement in multiple voluntary organizations to facilitate political participation, members need to be exposed to political cues and information within the organizations, either through connections with politically active friends or through high levels of informal political discussion among members.<sup>15</sup>

In a nutshell, the conclusion that associational life is linked to enhanced political participation is beyond dispute, but the mechanism linking the two is not clearly understood.

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Nie, *Participation in America: Political Democracy and Social Equality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972); Sidney Verba, Kay Lehman Schlozman, and Henry E. Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Voluntarism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); and Dag Wollebæk and Per Selle, "Participation and Social Capital Formation: Norway in a Comparative Perspective," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 2003): 67-91.

<sup>11</sup>Jan W. van Deth, "Interesting but Irrelevant: Social Capital and the Saliency of Politics in Western Europe," *European Journal of Political Research* 37, no. 2 (2000): 115-47.

<sup>12</sup>Stolle and Rochon, "Are All Associations Alike," 57.

<sup>13</sup>Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, 244-49, 255.

<sup>14</sup>Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, 263-65; Olsen, "Social Participation and Voting Turnout," 321-24; and Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, 180-82, 184.

<sup>15</sup>Rogers et al., "Voluntary Association Membership and Political Participation," 308-9, 311, 314-15; and Verba and Nie, *Participation in America*, 309.

*The Civic Voluntarism Model*

To understand the process by which citizens become politically active, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady developed a civic voluntarism model that rests on three factors—motivation, capacity, and mobilization. Instead of asking why certain people are active while others are not, they ask why people do not participate. If people "don't want to" participate, it implies lack of motivation; if "they can't," it suggests lack of capacity; and if "nobody asked" there is an absence of recruitment networks by means of which citizens are mobilized into politics. The civic voluntarism model suggests that access to resources, including civic capacities (civic skills), psychological engagement in politics (interest in politics), and direct mobilization are all necessary for political activity to take place. If voluntary associations do indeed provide opportunities for members to practice civic skills or become interested in politics, and if these opportunities are necessary for political activities to take place, the mechanism linking associational participation to political involvement is revealed. According to Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, citizens need to be subject to many external stimuli in various settings in order to become interested in politics, develop civic skills, or be exposed to recruitment networks.<sup>16</sup> In this paper, we explore whether voluntary associations play a major role in providing opportunities for citizens to improve or maintain their civic skills, or to become interested in politics. If they do, we can conclude that voluntary associations affect political involvement mainly by functioning as schools of democracy in which members hone their civic skills and become politically motivated.

*Social Participation Theory and Its Mobilization Variant*

Olsen's social participation theory suggests that participating in non-political organizations does indeed promote political activism with participatory orientations as mediating factors. There are several reasons why such participation can increase political activity outside of the group. First,

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<sup>16</sup>For a detailed discussion of the model, see Verba et al., *Voice and Equality*, 4, 309-33, 344-48.

organizational participation broadens one's political horizons, so that the individual becomes more interested in public affairs or political issues—joiners are politically motivated. Second, voluntary organizations serve as a recruiting ground by connecting members with many new and diverse people, and the resulting social relations draw the individual into political activities—joiners are mobilized to participate in politics. Third, voluntary organizations provide opportunities for members to acquire civic skills that are transferable to other political spheres—joiners improve or maintain their civic skills.<sup>17</sup>

Building on Olsen's work, Pollock posits a mobilization version of social participation theory by arguing that members were susceptible to two forms of mobilization—intentional and unintentional—within organizations. According to the intentional mobilization model, voluntary organizations promote political activism because members are subject to the direct requests of group leaders as well as fellow members to become engaged politically. The unintentional mobilization model focuses on the socializing capacity of civic organizations. It is argued that associational life enhances political participation by providing members with the opportunity to acquire civic skills transferable to the political arena and to adopt civic virtues essential for effective political engagement. To Pollock, this kind of mobilization is unintentional because individuals who join organizations might not intend to become politically active.<sup>18</sup> In fact, it has been argued that unintentional mobilization is more effective than intentional mobilization in promoting political activism since the former is primarily driven by the acquisition of civic skills and the adoption of political orientations regardless of the individual's initial incentives for joining the organizations.<sup>19</sup> In the present study, we exclude intentional

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<sup>17</sup>Olsen, "Social Participation and Voting Turnout," 331.

<sup>18</sup>Philip H. Pollock, "Organizations as Agents of Mobilization: How Does Group Activity Affect Political Participation?" *American Journal of Political Science* 26, no. 3 (August 1982): 485-503.

<sup>19</sup>Jan Leighley, "Group Membership and the Mobilization of Political Participation," *Journal of Politics* 58, no. 2 (May 1996): 447-49, 453-55, 459.

mobilization from our analytical model for two reasons: first, political mobilization is not common in Macau since it is not encouraged by the local government or the central government in Beijing; and second, most political activities included in our study, such as voicing views on public issues in the media, and expressing political views to government officials, senators, or social organizations, or via the internet, are not subject to political mobilization.

According to the unintentional mobilization model, the capacity for voluntary organizations to promote political activism depends upon the opportunities individuals are given to practice civic skills or be exposed to political cues or information within the organization. Empirical evidence of the socializing capacity of voluntary associations is abundant. They are seen as schools of democracy in which people acquire civic skills<sup>20</sup> and take an interest in politics.<sup>21</sup> In particular, the opportunities to develop civic skills increase with the number of memberships.<sup>22</sup>

Meanwhile, the positive relationships between mediating factors such as civic skills or political interest and political participation are also well-documented. Verba et al. argue that civic skills, such as writing a letter, organizing a meeting, or giving a presentation within the organization, are strongly and positively related to political involvement,<sup>23</sup> while Erickson and Nosanchuk contend that only politically relevant civic skill-acts, such as formal or informal political discussions, seem to lead to en-

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<sup>20</sup>See, for example, Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*; Gary S. Becker, *Human Capital* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964); Jan W. van Deth, "Social Involvement and Democratic Politics," in *Private Groups and Public Life: Social Participation, Voluntary Association and Political Involvement in Representative Democracies*, ed. Jan W. van Deth (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), 93-104; and Christian Welzel, Ronald F. Inglehart, and Franziska Deutsch, "Social Capital, Voluntary Associations, Collective Action: Which Aspects of Social Capital Have the Greatest 'Civic' Payoff?" *Journal of Civil Society* 1, no. 2 (2005): 121-46.

<sup>21</sup>Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 31-79, 116-33.

<sup>22</sup>Jan Teorell, "Linking Social Capital to Political Participation: Voluntary Associations and Networks of Recruitment in Sweden," *Scandinavian Political Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 2003): 52.

<sup>23</sup>Verba et al., *Voice and Equality*, 16-20, 310-30.

hanced political activity.<sup>24</sup> Besides the nature of the civic skills, the context in which the skills are acquired also affects their relationship with political activity. For instance, civic skills developed in more voluntary settings exert a much greater effect on individuals' levels of political participation than do skills formed in the less voluntary setting of the workplace. Civic skills acquired in voluntary organizations also exert a greater influence on time-based political activities than on other modes of political participation and their effects rival those of some of the classic socioeconomic status predictors.<sup>25</sup> In addition to civic skills, an individual's level of interest in local or national politics is also a significant predictor of political participation.<sup>26</sup>

In line with the mobilization version of social participation theory, we hypothesize that the causal relationship between associational participation and political involvement is mediated by factors such as civic skills and political interest. Using path analysis, we try to answer the following questions:

1. Do voluntary organizations in Macau serve as schools of democracy in which individuals acquire civic skills and become interested in politics?
2. Is the effect of civic participation on political involvement mediated by participatory orientations such as civic skills acquired within the organizations or political interest?
3. Which participatory orientation is more important in mediating the effect of associational participation on political involvement in civil society in a non-Western context?

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<sup>24</sup>Erickson and Nosanchuk, "How an Apolitical Association Politicizes?"

<sup>25</sup>Louis J. Ayala, "Trained for Democracy: The Differing Effects of Voluntary and Involuntary Organizations on Political Participation," *Political Research Quarterly* 53, no. 1 (March 2000): 104.

<sup>26</sup>Sarah Sobieraj and Deborah White, "Taxing Political Life: Reevaluating the Relationship between Voluntary Association Membership, Political Engagement, and the State," *Sociological Quarterly* 45, no. 4 (2004): 750, 753.

## Methodology

Our data comes from a telephone survey conducted in 2009 of 1,046 randomly selected Macau residents aged eighteen years and over. The phone numbers were randomly generated in an effort to make our sample as representative as possible. The response rate was 73.7 percent. Out of 1,046 respondents, 17 percent reported that they had at some time been affiliated with at least one association while a mere 6 percent reported that they had more than one membership. As many as 69 percent reported that they had participated in at least one political activity in the previous year. The average age of our sample was thirty-seven, 58 percent males and 42 percent females.

A path model is applied to unravel the mechanism linking associational participation to political involvement while controlling for education, age, and gender. Path analysis involves the evaluation of presumed causal relationships among observed variables. The overall goal is to estimate causal versus noncausal aspects of observed correlations. In the path model, number of memberships is the independent variable and overall political participation is the dependent variable, with political interest and civic skills acquired within voluntary organizations postulated as mediating variables that transmit some of the effects of associational life to overall political participation. Finally, education and age are used as control variables in an attempt to tease out some of the spurious correlations between associational life and civic skills, political interest, and overall political participation, respectively. Before interpreting the path coefficients, the goodness-of-fit indexes (GFI) of the model will be checked. Goodness-of-fit reflects the capacity of our model to reproduce the data. However, a well-fitting model is not necessarily valid given that there are many alternative models that can fit the data. The significance of individual path coefficient estimates is not as important as the fit indexes indicating the overall model fit. We check the significance of each path coefficient only when the overall model is accepted.

Maximum likelihood (ML) estimation rather than ordinary least squares regression is used in a path model. The path model was analyzed

using AMOS (Analysis of Moment Structures 19). When AMOS reads the data files and encounters missing data, it automatically uses full information maximum likelihood estimation to deal with the missing data. Whenever there are missing data, the goodness-of-fit index is not reported in AMOS.

### **The Measurement**

The dependent variable, *overall political participation*, is a summary measure of political participation that is an additive score of eight separate items. Respondents were asked whether they vote, attend social and political protests, voice their views on public issues in the media, and whether they express their political views to any government officials, senators, or social organizations, or via the internet. Out of those eight items, only one is an electoral activity, participation in the 2005 Macau Legislative Council Election, and the rest fall into the category of time-based political activities. All these eight items are institutionalized political activities through which participants can influence government policymaking.

Our independent variable, *number of memberships*, measures the extent of associational participation in Macau. Although we note that types of associations and frequency of participation are relevant factors for understanding the details of the relationship between associational life and political involvement, none of these further specifications drastically modifies the positive correlation between associational and political participation.<sup>27</sup> For the sake of simplicity, therefore, we use the number of memberships to approximate the extent of associational participation.

*Civic skills*, one of the two mediating variables, are measured by acts, such as giving a presentation or organizing a meeting, performed in the workplace, church-related groups, or other voluntary organizations.

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<sup>27</sup>Olsen, "Social Participation and Voting Turnout"; van Deth, "Social Involvement and Democratic Politics."

In contrast to the claim that civic skill-acts performed in these three settings are all related to political participation and their political effects are equal,<sup>28</sup> Ayala finds that workplace skills have a much smaller effect on participation than similar skill-acts performed in voluntary organizations.<sup>29</sup> Following his findings, an additive scale of five separate items indicating civic skill-acts performed in voluntary organizations is used as a measure of civic skills in the present study. Respondents were asked whether they ever volunteered to assist with organizational activities, whether they organized meetings or activities, or gave a speech or presentation within the organization, or whether they served on committees. The Cronbach's coefficient alpha for this scale is .91.

*Political interest*, the other mediating variable, is measured by asking the respondents the extent to which they were interested in politics and the frequency with which they were exposed to political cues or information through reading newspapers, listening to the radio, or watching TV. Political interest is a standard measure of psychological engagement in politics.<sup>30</sup>

Among the control variables, *education* is used to indicate the individual's social status rather than income, occupation, or a composite socioeconomic scale. The rationale behind this choice is that education functions differently as a political resource when compared to income or occupation: education itself fosters civic skills transferable to the political sphere and instills civic orientations essential for active participation in politics.<sup>31</sup> Brady et al. also argue that education is a significant predictor for all forms of political acts, and time-based political activities in particular.<sup>32</sup> Meanwhile, income and occupation are important for campaign-

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<sup>28</sup>Verba et al., *Voice and Equality*, 304-33.

<sup>29</sup>Ayala, "Trained for Democracy," 101, 106-8.

<sup>30</sup>Henry E. Brady, Sidney Verba, and Kay Lehman Schlozman, "Beyond SES: A Resource Model of Political Participation," *American Political Science Review* 89, no. 2 (June 1995): 271-94.

<sup>31</sup>Sidney Verba et al., "Race, Ethnicity, and Political Resources: Participation in the United States," *British Journal of Political Sciences* 23, no. 4 (October 1993): 453-97.

<sup>32</sup>Brady et al., "Beyond SES," 271-72, 283.

related political activities because of the monetary resources they provide. Since almost all the political activities we examine in this paper are time-based ones, we use education as a proxy for the individual's social status, not income or occupation.

*Age* is included as one of the control variables since it can be the cause of spurious relationships between organizational participation and political involvement.<sup>33</sup>

Since *gender* is a fixed binary variable whose inclusion may violate the multivariate normality distribution assumption of structural equation models, we analyze a multiple group model to control for the effect of gender in the path analysis and estimate its effects indirectly. The effects of associational life on political participation may differ in men and women; we therefore test a structural weights model in which the corresponding regression weights from each group are set as equal. If the structural weights model is accepted, it means that the regression weights of associational life on political participation are constant across groups.<sup>34</sup>

## **Findings**

We first present the basic descriptive statistics of the variables used in this study, including the means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations, in an attempt to allow subsequent researchers to repeat our analysis. According to the data in table 1, the respondents in this study spent an average of ten years in school and their average age is thirty-seven. On average, each respondent participates in .28 organizations. The average score for political interest is 3.16 out of a scale of 4.50 with the larger number indicating increased political interest. The average score for the sum of civic skills developed in the voluntary organizations is .43 since the majority of

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<sup>33</sup>L. S. Tossutti, "Voluntary Associations and the Political Engagement of Young Canadians," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 1 (Winter 2007): 105, 112.

<sup>34</sup>Barbara M. Byrne, *Structural Equation Modeling with AMOS: Basic Concepts, Applications, and Programming* (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates 2001).

**Table 1**  
**Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations for Model Variables**

	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Education	10.19	3.77	–					
2. Age	37.42	16.47	-.51***	–				
3. Number of memberships	.28	.75	.01	.08*	–			
4. Civic skills	.43	1.20	.09**	-.01	.70***	–		
5. Interest in politics	3.16	.66	.12***	.07*	.16***	.15***	–	
6. Political participation	1.15	1.14	-.01	.04	.20***	.20***	.32***	–

\* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Table 2**  
**Goodness of Fit Summary of the Path Model (N = 1,046)**

Fix indexes	$\chi^2$ (p-value)	df	$\chi^2/df$	NFI	CFI	RMSEA
Model 1	6.22 (p = .102)	3	2.1	.995	.997	.032

our respondents do not participate in any voluntary organizations. Each respondent participates in 1.15 political activities on average.

By testing the unintentional mobilization model, we assume that there is no direct causal relationship between number of memberships and political participation. The effects of associational participation on political involvement are mediated by factors such as civic skills acquired within voluntary organizations and political interests. We investigate whether voluntary organizations serve as schools of democracy in which civic skills and political interest are generated. Education and age are controlled in order to tease out the potential spurious correlation between organizational participation and civic skills, political interest, and political involvement. The overall fit of this path model is displayed in table 2.

A large number of fit indexes are reported in AMOS, one of the most important being goodness-of-fit  $\chi^2$  statistics which are interpreted as a test of significance of the difference in fit between our model and a just-identified version of it. If  $\chi^2$  statistics are significant at the .05 at level ( $p$  value

less than .05), it means that the fit of our model is significantly worse than if it were just-identified. Thus, low and non-significant values of  $\chi^2$  statistics are desired. NFI is the normed fit index, which varies from 0 to 1, with 1 equal to perfect fit. By convention, NFI values above .90 indicate an acceptable fit. CFI is the comparative fit index, which also varies from 0 to 1, with 1 equal to a perfect fit. CFI close to 1 indicates a very good fit, and values above .90 are deemed an acceptable fit. CFI is different from NFI in the sense that it provides an accurate assessment of goodness of fit regardless of sample size. By convention, RMSEA (root mean square error of approximation) values below .05 indicate a good fit.

Our model fits the data very well since the  $\chi^2$  statistics are not significant at .05 level ( $p = .102$ ) with a value of 6.22 and three degrees of freedom. Other model fit indexes also indicate a good fit, with NFI = .995, CFI = .997, and RMSEA = .032. Apparently, the unintentional mobilization model has been supported since we find that associational participation leads to political engagement through mediating factors such as civic skills and political interest even after we control for the confounding effects of education and age. While we are fully aware of the fact that there may be other equivalent models that fit the data equally well, our findings from the path model have been corroborated by the corresponding results obtained from linear regression analysis even after controlling for the individual's level of education, occupation, family income, marital status, and age (results are available upon request).

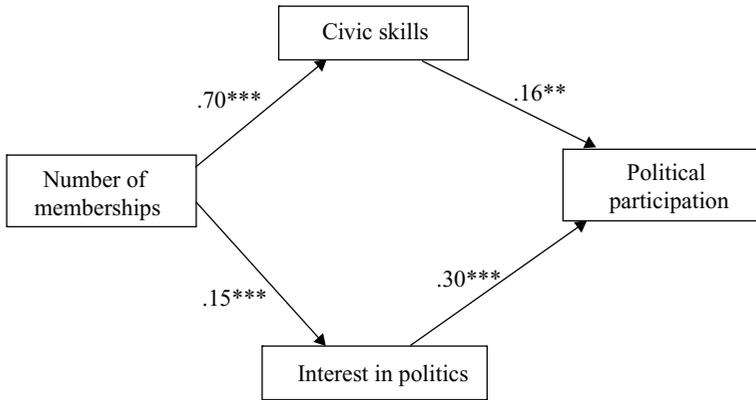
Next, we examine whether, in a non-Western context, voluntary organizations act as schools of democracy in which individuals acquire civic skills and become more interested in politics. Some of the correlations between associational participation and civic skills might be spurious since well-educated individuals are more likely to join organizations ( $\beta = .06$  &  $p = .08$ ) and they also score higher on the civic skill scale ( $\beta = .085$  &  $p = .000$ ) (see table 3). Some of the spurious correlations between associational participation and the acquisition of civic skills are teased out after we control for level of education. We find that with one standard deviation increase in the number of memberships, the scale of civic skills is increased by .70 standard deviation ( $\beta = .70$  &  $p = .000$ ) net of education.

**Table 3**  
**Maximum Likelihood Estimates**

Paths		Estimates	Beta	P values
Age	Multiple affiliations	0.005	0.106	0.003
Age	Political participation	.000	.002	0.950
Age	Interest in politics	0.006	0.158	0.000
Education	Multiple affiliations	0.013	0.063	0.080
Education	Civic skills	0.027	0.085	0.000
Education	Interest in politics	0.035	0.201	0.000
Education	Political participation	-0.015	-0.048	0.200
Multiple Affiliations	Civic skills	1.127	0.702	0.000
Multiple Affiliations	Interest in politics	0.134	0.152	0.000
Civic Skills	Political participation	0.153	0.161	0.000
Interest in Politics	Political participation	0.512	0.296	0.000

Besides joining more organizations and possessing more civic skills acquired within the organizations, well-educated individuals also take more interest in politics. Each standard deviation increase in schooling leads to a .20 standard deviation increase in political interest ( $\beta = .20$  &  $p = .000$ ). Similarly, the level of education is controlled in order to tease out some of the spurious correlations between associational participation and political interest. We find that each standard deviation increase in membership leads to a .15 standard deviation increase in political interest net of education ( $\beta = .15$  &  $p = .000$ ). We conclude that the hypothesis of voluntary organizations acting as schools of democracy is supported in the sense that participating in associations does indeed stimulate political interest and develop civic skills among joiners net of education and age. The corresponding standardized path coefficients (Beta values) show that voluntary organizations do a better job in providing opportunities for members to practice civic skills than they do in stimulating political interest among joiners. For instance, one standard deviation increase in the number of memberships leads to a .70 standard deviation increase in civic skills, but only a .15 standard deviation increase in political interest. In other words, joiners are provided with many opportunities to develop civic skills but

**Figure 1**  
**A Path Model Testing the Unintentional Mobilization Model with the Effects of Associational Participation Mediated by Civic Skills and Interest in Politics**



\*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

**Note:** Control variables are not shown for the sake of simplicity.

are less likely to be exposed to political cues or information within the organizations, something which is supposed to stimulate political interest among members.

Next, we compare the relative importance of civic skills and political interest as mediators between associational participation and political involvement (see figure 1). This is done by comparing the indirect effects of associational participation on political involvement through each of these factors individually. The indirect effects are calculated as the product of the direct effects, either standardized or unstandardized, that comprise them. Standardized direct effects are multiplied in the present study to calculate the indirect effects in an effort to facilitate comparison between variables of different metrics. For instance, the standardized indirect effect of associational participation on political participation through the civic skills acquired within the organizations is the product of .70 (number of memberships civic skills) and .16 (civic skills political participation), or  $(.70) * (.16) = .11$ . The standardized indirect effect of associational participation on political participation through political interest is the product

of .15 (number of membership → political interests) and .30 (political interests → political participation), or  $(.15) * (.30) = .05$  (see figure 1). According to Kline, indirect effects can be taken as significant if all of their component path coefficients are significant.<sup>35</sup> Both indirect effects in our study are significant since all the component path coefficients involved in calculating the indirect effects are significant at .05 level. Therefore, we conclude that civic skills acquired within the organizations (.11) are more important as a mediating variable than political interest (.05) in transmitting part of the effects of associational participation to political participation.

In addition to the main analysis, a multiple group analysis that tests gender as a moderator is conducted, and the model fits the data very well (NFI = .981 CFI = .998 and RMSEA = .011) after we impose the cross-group equality constraints on path coefficients. We conclude that the mechanism linking associational participation to political involvement is the same for men and women (results are available upon request).

To sum up, we find that voluntary organizations act as schools of democracy in which individuals acquire civic skills and become more interested in politics. The unintentional mobilization version of social participation theory has been supported by our data. This means that the mechanism linking associational participation to political involvement is the same in Macau as in Western societies in the sense that associational participation has positive effects on political involvement indirectly through the cultivation of civic skills and stimulation of interest in politics among members. We also find that civic skills acquired within organizations play a bigger role as a mediator than political interest after we control for some of the confounding effects. Also, there is no gender difference in the politicizing mechanism of civic organizations in Macau.

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<sup>35</sup>Rex B. Kline, *Principles and Practice of Structural Equation Modeling* (New York: Guilford, 1998).

## **Discussion**

The mechanism linking associational participation to political involvement has been well-studied in mature or newly established democracies, but few studies have examined the politicizing mechanism of voluntary organizations in non-Western societies due to the scarcity of data. As far as we know, our study is the first to test an unintentional mobilization version of social participation theory using path analysis in the context of a non-Western society. Our conclusion is that voluntary organizations still serve as schools of democracy in non-Western societies even if the political environment in Macau is not the same as that found in the West. Joiners acquire civic skills and become interested in politics through participating in voluntary organizations in Macau. Interestingly, we find that associational participation in Macau exerts different effects on the acquisition of civic skills and the stimulation of political interest among joiners. It seems that voluntary organizations in Macau provide many opportunities for members to practice civic skills but fail to do an adequate job in stimulating members' interest in politics. This may be due to the fact that when it comes to politics, the majority of voluntary associations in Macau mainly engage in progovernment activities and are reluctant to challenge government policies. Their progovernment stance makes it less likely that they will stimulate their members' interest in politics. As indicated by the data, the effect of associational participation on the stimulation of political interest is only slightly over one fifth ( $.15/.7$ ) that of associational participation on the acquisition of civic skills. But interest in politics has almost two times ( $.30/.16$ ) as much effect on political participation as civic skills. We believe that if voluntary organizations encouraged more political discussions or passed more political information or cues to their members, they might then play a bigger role in transmitting the effects of associational participation to political participation in Macau.

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