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September, 2004

# Community Determinants of Volunteer Participation: The Case of Japan

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# Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly

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*Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 2004 33: 8S

DOI: 10.1177/0899764004265434

The online version of this article can be found at:

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## ARTICLES

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### Community Determinates of Volunteer Participation and the Promotion of Civic Health: The Case of Japan

Mary Alice Haddad  
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*Why are some communities more civically engaged than others? Why do some communities provide services with volunteer labor whereas others rely primarily on government provision? When communities provide both volunteer and paid labor for the same service, how do they motivate and organize those volunteers? This article addresses these questions through quantitative tests of prevailing explanations for levels of civic engagement (e.g., education, TV viewing, urbanization) and qualitative analyses of case studies of three medium-sized cities in Japan, focusing particularly on the service areas of firefighting and elder care. The statistical analyses demonstrate that current explanations that rely on individual characteristics cannot predict or explain volunteer participation at the community level of analysis. Using the case study data, a model is developed to predict the rate of volunteer participation in a community. It is concluded that the practices of governmental and social institutions—how well they legitimize, fund, and organize volunteers—determine the rate of volunteer participation in a community.*

**Keywords:** *civil society; elder care; firefighting; Japan; public policy; volunteering*

Metropolitan communities provide a myriad of services to their citizens, but they do so through different means. Why are some communities more civically engaged than others? Why do some communities provide services with volunteer labor whereas others rely primarily on government provision? When communities utilize both volunteer and paid labor for the same service, how do they motivate and organize those volunteers? These questions lie at the heart of the state-society relationship, and their answers provide clues

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*Note:* The author would like to thank Eyal Ben-Ari, Dave Brockington, Joel Migdal, Sarah Pickert, Steven Rathgeb Smith, Theda Skocpol, Erik Wibbels, and four anonymous reviewers for comments on earlier versions of this article. The research in Japan was possible thanks to a Fulbright Fellowship provided with the generous support of the A50 Program and the Institute for International Education and a Chester Fritz grant from the Graduate School of the University of Washington.

Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, Supplement to vol. 33, no. 3, September 2004 8S-31S  
DOI: 10.1177/0899764004265434  
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about the dynamic relationship between democratic citizens and their governments.

Recent studies of civic engagement in the United States have generated valuable tools for predicting which individuals will volunteer and how much. For example, we now have a better understanding of why a college-educated suburbanite would be more likely to volunteer than an inner-city high school dropout. However, these studies do not help us understand why one community has much higher rates of volunteerism than another community with similar demographic characteristics. Because most scholars, governments, and activists are interested in building healthy, civically engaged communities, not necessarily changing the psychology or propensity to volunteer of individuals, we need to look at volunteering as more of a collective activity than an individual one. For our research on civil society to be useful for building healthier democracies, we need to treat volunteer organizations as part of the societies and polities in which they reside and identify the characteristics that encourage higher levels of civic engagement.

To explain variation in volunteering at the level of the community, this article focuses on Japan, an advanced democratic country that has been characterized as a nation with low levels of volunteering (Amemiya, 1998; Curtis, Grabb, & Baer, 1992; Nakata, 1996; Vosse, 1999; Wuthnow, 1991). However, for some services such as firefighting and elder care, it has very high volunteer participation. Although volunteer participation will be discussed in general, the focus of this study is on two services, firefighting and elder care, that are provided by both volunteers and paid government employees simultaneously. Following a brief review of the literature, the article demonstrates statistically that prevailing explanations of civic involvement do not adequately account for variations in volunteering at the community level. The article then describes a community-level model that does account for variations in volunteer participation. The model posits that the level of volunteer participation in a community is a function of how well governments and social organizations legitimize, organize, and fund volunteers in that community.

#### CONVENTIONAL EXPLANATIONS OF VOLUNTEER PARTICIPATION

Scholars who research variation in volunteer participation can be divided into two groups. The first group looks primarily to individual characteristics to explain variation in volunteer participation rates, and the second group looks to collective characteristics to explain the same variation. The first group of scholars is primarily concerned with explaining changes in volunteer participation in the United States over the past half century. These scholars vary widely on their prognoses. Robert Putnam (2000) documented the extensive decline of participation, Everett Ladd (1999) documented the extensive rise in

participation, and Wuthnow (1998) and Theda Skocpol (2003) suggested that some kinds of participation are declining whereas others are rising.

Although these scholars vary in their diagnosis of the health of civil society in the United States, they all agree on the set of characteristics that determine an individual's propensity to volunteer. In particular, higher income and education levels increase the likelihood that an individual will be civically engaged. Many hours of TV viewing is detrimental; people who watch a lot of TV volunteer much less than those who spend less time in front of the tube. The findings on the influence of dual-income families (i.e., working women) are more mixed; some studies find that having two income earners in the family decreases leisure time, whereas others find that women involved in the workforce are more likely than their stay-at-home counterparts to join and participate in professional associations and other forms of civic organizations.<sup>1</sup>

A second set of scholars looks to collective characteristics to explain variations in volunteer behavior. The empirical findings for these examinations are more mixed than those for the individual-level effects. One contextual effect that has been studied is the effect of rural versus urban contexts on volunteering behavior. Several studies have found that rural people and those that live in smaller, close-knit communities are more likely to volunteer than those in urban cities (Gamm & Putnam, 1999; Oliver, 2000). Others have found that there is no significant difference in the volunteering rates between people living in urban and rural areas (Lesk & Zippel, 1975; Steblay, 1987).

Another collective effect that has been extensively studied has been the influence of government policy on the numbers of nonprofit organizations and volunteers. Lester Salamon's *Partners in Public Service* (1995) and Steven Rathgeb Smith and Michael Lipsky's *Nonprofits for Hire* (1993) both found that there has been extensive government-private-sector cooperation in the delivery of public services. Although Salamon took a more historical perspective and S. Smith and Lipsky examined the contemporary situation more closely, they both demonstrated the heavy reliance of the nonprofit sector on government funding. They demonstrated that there has been a positive relationship between government funding and the scope and size of the nonprofit sector (and their associated volunteers). Roger Kemp's edited volume, *Privatization* (1991), came to the opposite conclusion. Through the examination of many different service areas from garbage collection to firefighting services, the authors in the volume argued that increased government involvement and professionalized staff could crowd out private organizations and volunteers from providing services.

Although there is considerable evidence that an individual's characteristics influence his or her propensity to volunteer, there is little evidence that a mere aggregation of these characteristics (e.g., a city's per capita income as opposed to an individual's income) can explain collective-level variation in volunteer participation. The collective-level factors such as population density or government funding have so far produced mixed results in predicting individual volunteer participation rates. Thus, my first task is to test whether factors

identified by the current literature can also account for community-level variation, because if they do, there is no need to develop a community-level model of volunteer participation.

### TESTING CONVENTIONAL EXPLANATIONS

This section tests how well the factors that the literature has found to predict volunteering rates at the individual level can be used to predict volunteering at the community level. If volunteering by communities is merely the sum of individual efforts, then we should expect the variables with explanatory power at the individual level to explain variation at higher levels of aggregation.

I begin by selecting units of analyses that are above the level of the individual but below the level of the national government. I measure community with two proxy units selected because they are sufficiently small to reflect subnational variation but sufficiently large for there to be meaningful data sources: Japanese prefectures (equivalent to American states; 47 total) and municipalities (3,251 total). I measure volunteering (the dependent variable) in a variety of ways. First, I collected prefectural membership data from volunteer fire departments, volunteer welfare commissioner associations, senior clubs, and Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs). I also obtained survey data reporting the number of people who volunteer in social services and the number of hours those volunteers donated. I include the number of registered non-profit organizations in the prefectures as an additional measure of volunteering activity (see appendix for source information).

To measure the effect of individual characteristics, I examine the influence of education, income, TV viewing, and working women on the seven measures of volunteer participation. I measure the education level of the prefecture as the percentage of high school graduates who go on to higher education, and I measure the income level as the per capita income in the prefecture. Television viewing is measured as the average number of hours of television viewing in the prefecture. The percentage of women in the workforce is used as a proxy measurement for dual-income families.

Two collective-level variables are also tested for how much they influence volunteer participation rates: urbanization and government spending. Population density (population per square kilometer) is used as a proxy measure for urbanization. Government spending is measured as per capita government spending in the prefecture and, as an additional measure, the number of professional employees performing the same work as the volunteers where applicable (home helpers in the case of volunteer welfare commissioners and social service volunteers, and career firefighters in the case of volunteer firefighters).

Finally, a few control variables have been included to insure that statistically identified relationships are not spurious. For regressions where the

dependent variable is volunteer welfare commissioners, senior clubs, social service volunteers, or the number of hours donated by social service volunteers, the proportion of the population more than 65 years of age is added as a control. For volunteer firefighters, the per capita number of fires is included. For PTA membership, the per capita number of schools is included.

To test the influence of these variables on the level of volunteering, I ran ordinary least squares regressions for each of the dependent variables. Initially, I ran a regression with as many of the relevant independent variables as I could without including any with Pearson correlation values of greater than 0.5<sup>2</sup> with any of the other variables: population density, education, women in the workforce, TV viewing, government spending, career workers, and any relevant control variables. Some of the independent variables (namely, population density, education, income, government spending, and proportion of elderly) were highly correlated with one another. These variables directly measure some characteristic of the prefecture (e.g., per capita income) and indirectly measure the prefecture's level of urbanization. Rural areas tend to have lower income levels, more elderly people, lower population densities, and higher per capita government spending. To identify the relative importance of each factor, I tested each of them separately. Finally, because Tokyo is a statistical outlier for several variables (income, population density, home helpers, PTA membership, and nonprofit organizations), I also included a Tokyo dummy variable as an additional control in all of the regressions.

### SUMMARY OF STATISTICAL FINDINGS

For the seven measures of community volunteerism (volunteer firefighters, volunteer welfare commissioners, seniors club members, social service volunteers, hours donated by social service volunteers, PTA members, nonprofit organizations), the variables that the current literature uses to predict volunteerism were largely unable to account for variation in the per capita number of volunteers at the prefectural or municipal levels.

The individual-level factors (education, income, dual-income families, and TV viewing), which have been able to explain volunteering behavior of individuals, are not particularly able to explain volunteering behavior at higher levels of social aggregation. Furthermore, collective-level factors such as population density or government spending either did not affect volunteerism much at all or affected it in the opposite direction from what was expected.

Although education is one of the strongest predictors of volunteering behavior on the individual level, it did not explain any variation in the rate of volunteering in prefectures. Similarly, income is usually a good predictor of volunteering behavior at the individual level, but in these tests it was statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level for only volunteer firefighting; it accounted for only 12% of the variation, and the coefficient was in the opposite direction from what would be expected—higher income prefectures had *lower* rates of

**Table 1. Volunteer Participation in Japanese Prefectures—Full Regression (N = 47)**

	Volunteer Firefighters	Welfare Commission	Senior Club	Social Service	Hours of Social Service	PTA Members	NPOs
Population density	-0.398** (0.001)	-0.323* (0.000)	-456** (0.005)	-0.382 (0.000)	0.207 (0.000)	-0.089 (0.002)	0.019 (0.000)
Education	-0.191 (0.121)	0.009 (0.008)	0.185 (0.445)	0.342 (0.028)	0.119 (0.010)	-0.162 (0.218)	0.034 (0.016)
Working women	-0.150 (0.175)	-0.073 (0.012)	0.017 (0.661)	0.041 (0.042)	-0.170 (0.014)	-0.021 (0.310)	0.183* (0.023)
TV viewing	0.023 (4.293)	0.015 (0.265)	-155 (14.865)	-0.401** (0.941)	0.207 (0.325)	-0.036 (7.027)	-0.023 (0.518)
Government spending	0.247 (4.000)	0.606*** (0.000)	0.313* (0.000)	-0.103 (0.000)	0.195 (0.000)	0.024 (0.000)	-0.176 (0.000)
Career firefighters	0.017 (4.167)						
Home helpers		0.233 (0.163)	0.320* (9.131)	0.020 (0.578)	-0.010 (0.200)		
Control variables							
Fires	0.111 (0.228)						
Elderly		-0.092 (0.023)	0.114 (1.316)	0.338* (0.083)	0.008 (0.029)		
Schools						0.102 (0.166)	
Tokyo dummy	0.029 (7.981)	-0.252 (0.604)	-0.218 (33.851)	0.067 (2.143)	0.063 (0.740)	-0.581*** (13.804)	0.755*** (1.044)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.280	.569	.464	.210	.000	.445	.581

Note: Analysis is by ordinary least squares. Entries are standardized beta coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. PTA = Parent-Teacher Association; NPOs = nonprofit organizations.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .



Table 2. Volunteer Behavior in Japanese Prefectures—Rural/Urban Variables Tested Separately (N = 47)

Urban Variables	Volunteer Firefighters	Welfare Commission	Senior Club	Social Service	Hours of Social Service	PTA Members	NPOs
Population density	-0.593*** (0.001)	-0.523** (0.000)	-0.493** (1.272)	-0.192 (0.000)	0.175 (0.000)	-0.102 (0.002)	0.104 (0.000)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.256	.343	.329	.013	-.019	.472	.571
Education	-0.355** (0.121)	-0.140 (0.010)	0.096 (0.493)	0.375** (0.027)	0.080 (0.009)	-0.169 (0.202)	0.092 (0.014)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.161	.259	.241	.132	-.025	.491	.573
Income	-0.433** (0.003)	-0.212 (0.000)	0.101 (0.014)	0.275 (0.001)	-0.040 (0.000)	-0.224 (0.005)	-0.193* (0.000)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.172	.256	.237	.033	-.031	.492	.592
Government spending	0.456*** (0.000)	0.728*** (0.000)	0.453*** (0.000)	-0.123 (0.000)	0.040 (0.000)	0.087 (0.000)	-0.149 (0.000)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.259	.564	.360	.008	.000	.473	.588

Note: Analysis is by ordinary least squares. Entries are standardized beta coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. Regressions are run with a single independent variable (e.g., population density, education, income, etc.), appropriate control variables (e.g., per capita number of fires, elderly, schools), and the Tokyo dummy. Only the results for the independent variables are reported, because the rest are acting as controls and are not theoretically significant even if they are statistically significant. The adjusted R<sup>2</sup> is reported for the entire ordinary least squares regression. PTA = Parent-Teacher Association; NPOs = non-profit organizations.

\* $p < .10$ . \*\* $p < .05$ . \*\*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Table 3. Volunteer Firefighters in Japanese Municipalities (N = 3,251)

	Volunteer Firefighters	Per Capita Volunteer Firefighters	Growth in Number of Volunteer Firefighters
Population density	-0.442**** (0.000)		0.093**** (0.000)
Population growth		-0.109**** (0.006)	
Geographic size	-0.036** (0.002)	0.000 (0.002)	0.012 (0.003)
Per capita career firefighters	-0.010* (0.465)	-0.018 (0.523)	-0.071*** (0.713)
Growth in number of career firefighters	-0.051*** (0.004)	-0.011 (0.005)	0.182** (0.008)
Tokyo dummy	0.198**** (3.442)	-0.056**** (2.966)	0.010 (6.123)
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	.132	.016	.035
			-0.154**** (0.011)
			0.002 (0.003)
			-0.024 (0.868)
			0.093**** (0.009)
			0.057**** (4.924)
			.046

Note: Analysis is by ordinary least squares. Entries are standardized beta coefficients; standard errors are in parentheses. Growth is calculated as the difference between 1990 and 2000 values.

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

volunteering. The proportion of women in the workforce was not significant at the  $p < .05$  level for any measures of volunteering. Television viewing was only significant for the percentage of the population engaged in social service activities; the coefficient was in the expected negative direction—more TV viewing was associated with lower rates of volunteering.

Collective-level factors were somewhat more able to account for variation in volunteering rates. Population density was statistically insignificant in most of the regressions. In the full regression, it was statistically significant at the  $p < .05$  level for volunteer firefighters and senior club membership. In all cases, the coefficient was in the negative direction—prefectures with higher population densities had fewer volunteers. This gives lukewarm support for the findings that people in rural communities volunteer more than those in urban communities. However, the variable was statistically significant for fewer than half of the measures of volunteering, it could only explain one third of the variation in the best case, and the variance it explained for volunteer firefighters (28% in the full regression) dropped substantially (to 13%) at the municipal level. Just as Robinson (1950) found that variance explained tended to rise as the units were aggregated, these findings suggest that some of the explained variation at the prefectural level may be an artifact of the aggregation of the units rather than measuring a real effect of population density.

Turning to the variables studied by nonprofit and privatization scholars, government spending was the variable with the strongest predictive power. In the full regression, it accounted for nearly 60% of the variation in the per capita number of volunteer welfare commissioners. Alone (with controls) it was statistically significant in the cases of volunteer firefighters, volunteer welfare commissioners, and senior club membership to account for 26%, 56%, and 36% of the variation, respectively. In all cases, the relationship between government spending and volunteer rates was positive.

At the prefectural level, the number of career workers providing services similar to those provided by volunteers did not appear to affect the rate of volunteering in those service areas. There was no statistically significant relationship between the number of career firefighters and the number of volunteer firefighters. The number of home helpers was statistically significant for only one type of volunteering, senior club membership, and the direction of the effect was the opposite from what would have been expected—the per capita number of home helpers was positively associated with higher per capita levels of membership in senior clubs.

When the privatization literature's crowding out hypothesis was tested more closely at the municipal level for volunteer firefighters, the findings were again surprising. In the initial regression, it appeared that the number of career firefighters might have a negative influence on the number of volunteer firefighters, because there was a weak, statistically significant, negative relationship between the per capita number of career firefighters and the per capita number of volunteer firefighters in 2000 (statistically significant at  $p =$

.1). However, the per capita number of career firefighters had no statistically significant relationship with the growth (or decline) in the number of volunteer firefighters over the 10-year period between 1990 and 2000. Furthermore, the change in the number of career firefighters had a strongly significant ( $p < .001$ ), positive relationship with the change in the number of volunteer firefighters for the same time period. This finding suggests that career firefighters in Japan do not crowd out volunteer firefighters; in fact, the opposite is more likely to be true: They may encourage volunteering.

Although scholars have found a number of factors to be useful in predicting volunteering patterns by individuals, these factors do not explain much of the variation at higher levels of aggregation. In the cases above, the variables were often statistically insignificant, or the directions on the coefficients were the opposite of what would be expected by the theories. Thus, volunteering in a community is more than merely the sum of individual volunteer participation. Clearly, some process is occurring at the level of the community that engenders more volunteer participation in some places than in others.

### COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERISM

This section develops a model to explain and predict volunteer participation at the community level. I do this by examining volunteer participation in the delivery of two services, firefighting and elder care, in three medium-sized cities in Japan (Kashihara, Sakata, and Sanda). Based in the city of Kobe, I conducted 9 months of in-depth field research in these three cities by interviewing approximately 100 government officials, civic leaders, and volunteers and collecting hundreds of pages of published and unpublished documents. In each of the three cities, I interviewed approximately 10 government officials dealing with volunteer organizations. The remaining 70 interviewees were distributed among the volunteers themselves. In all three cities, I interviewed leaders and rank-and-file members of volunteer fire departments, volunteer welfare commissioners, neighborhood associations, and at least one Social Welfare Council organization dealing with the elderly.

I also collected published and unpublished documents related to volunteers and their organizations. This section begins with a brief outline of the case selection criteria and a description of the important volunteer organizations. The remainder of the section explores the mechanisms through which the practices of the state and society promote volunteer participation in the delivery of services.

Utilizing a most-similar case study approach, I selected three medium-sized Japanese cities with similar demographic characteristics (populations of approximately 100,000 people) but with different numbers of volunteer firefighters. Among these cities, Sanda, in the Hyogo prefecture, had the highest population growth between 1990 and 2000 but no change in the number of volunteer firefighters. Kashihara, in the Nara prefecture, had a stable

population and the largest increase in the number of volunteer firefighters (79%). Sakata, in the Yamagata prefecture, also had a stable population and had the largest decrease in the number of volunteer firefighters (31%).<sup>3</sup>

Within the three cities, I examined the volunteer provision of firefighting and elder care services. Two traditional, community-based organizations are of preeminent importance in providing these services. Volunteer fire departments are home to all of the volunteers providing fire services. Volunteer welfare commissioners provide a wide variety of services but have been exerting most of their energy in recent years working with the elderly. In addition to the volunteer welfare commissioners, a number of smaller organizations are also contributing volunteers for elder care services through Social Welfare Councils. Finally, although neighborhood associations do not have firefighting or elder care as their primary missions, they are critical to the functioning of all of the above organizations.

Japan's volunteer fire departments trace their history to the Tokugawa period (1600 to 1867). Nowadays, nearly every city, town, and village in Japan has an active volunteer fire department, and they are involved in far more than just firefighting. They often provide fire prevention and first aid demonstrations, aid in neighborhood festivals, and even deliver lunches to elderly living alone. There are currently 944,134 volunteer firefighters in Japan.<sup>4</sup>

The Volunteer Welfare Commissioner system, based on a similar program in Germany, began in 1918 after rice riots in Osaka drew attention to the rising problems of poverty in rapidly growing urban areas. Each city, town, and village appoints volunteer welfare commissioners to form an independent volunteer welfare commissioner council. Individual volunteers serve for a 3-year term, advising citizens and helping them with a variety of social welfare issues. There are currently 229,582 volunteer welfare commissioners in Japan, and in 2001, they dealt with more than 13 million cases.<sup>5</sup>

Most volunteer social service organizations in Japan are organized under the umbrella of their local Social Welfare Council. These councils were established across the country in the 1970s as quasi-governmental associations that brought city officials together with community leaders concerned with social welfare issues. They currently host a variety of volunteer groups working on social welfare. In 2000, there were more than 95,000 groups with more than 7.1 million volunteers registered with Social Welfare Councils across the country.<sup>6</sup>

Contemporary neighborhood associations trace their origins to the Tokugawa period (1600 to 1867). They function both as institutions of social control as well as channels for citizens to relay their concerns to the government. Neighborhood associations are the most basic social organization in Japan, and some scholars argue that they are more important than the family.<sup>7</sup> All of the above-mentioned community-based organizations are connected to the neighborhood association in their district. Approximately 90% of all Japanese households (or about 115 million people) are members of neighborhood associations.<sup>8</sup>

THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT  
IN LEGITIMIZING VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers do not supply services to their communities to gain material benefits. Rather, their motivations come from a sense of satisfaction that they are fulfilling an obligation to their communities, the joy they receive by helping others, and the personal friendships they build and maintain. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) called these benefits civic and social gratifications and noted the importance of personal involvement (as opposed to check-book participation) for receiving these benefits. The social nature of the benefits gained from volunteer activity underscores the vital importance of legitimizing the volunteer activities through norms of civic responsibility. Citizens legitimize the volunteer supply of services by paying public and private tribute to the volunteers through public ceremonies and festivals as well as private interactions that bestow respect and leadership on volunteers. The state, through laws and government-sponsored public demonstrations, codifies and publicizes the importance and role of the volunteers. Changing social conditions challenge traditional community norms of civic responsibility, and the volunteer organizations must find ways to adjust to these changes if they are to survive.

Volunteer firefighters are honored publicly in city and neighborhood festivals where they are able to show off their firefighting and acrobatic skills. A favorite activity at these festivals is a synchronized routine by a group of firefighters performing tricks atop 6-meter ladders in the way they did during the Tokugawa period. They are also asked to run public fire prevention demonstrations for neighborhood associations or schools.

Tribute to volunteer welfare commissioners comes in more personal ways through individual interactions and relationships formed when visiting an elderly person living alone or consulting with a family member about the prospects of a parent receiving elder care insurance benefits. Additionally, traditionally only aristocrats or other high-status individuals could hold the post of volunteer welfare commissioner, and although volunteers are no longer nobility, the position retains this respected status. Only people who have reputations for being responsible, hard working, and above all discrete will be asked by the nomination committee if they are interested in serving. Thus, receiving a request to serve is in itself a form of tribute.

In addition to legitimization from the community, both volunteer firefighters and volunteer welfare commissioners receive legitimation from the government through laws stipulating their purpose and providing legal protection. Both types of volunteers are treated as local public servants with special duties while they are on duty, and they receive the same death and disability benefits as city employees if they are hurt while serving in their public capacity. Laws also help set the expectations and guidelines for professionalism for volunteers. Volunteer firefighters have training requirements significantly below their career fire department counterparts and do not provide

emergency medical services. Likewise, volunteer welfare commissioners are given initial training at the beginning of their 3-year term, and subsequent trainings are largely voluntary. These national guidelines legitimize the work and level of professionalization of these volunteers, so they are not expected to expand their training unless they individually choose to do so.<sup>9</sup>

Although these symbolic events and legal protections continue to legitimize the work of volunteer firefighters and volunteer welfare commissioners, shifting demographics are challenging traditional norms of civic responsibility. Traditionally, volunteer firefighters were predominantly farming or self-employed young men, but recently, the number of salaried men and women who volunteer has skyrocketed.<sup>10</sup> For volunteer welfare commissioners, as well, the social environment has changed such that many more women now participate—55% of Japan's volunteer welfare commissioners are women, up from 23% in the early 1960s (Koseisho, 2000, p. 539).

All three cities—Kashihara, Sakata, and Sanda—have had mechanisms to legitimize their volunteers. All three cities have granted volunteer firefighters and volunteer welfare commissioners special legal status. All three cities also had symbolic means of legitimizing volunteers with public festivals honoring their services. Kashihara did the best job of this with several festivals for the volunteer firefighters including a Color Guard made up of members of the women's unit and a large conference honoring elder care volunteers. Compared to the other two cities, Sakata was catching up in this regard. They had only recently instituted a fire festival; they had held only one when I visited in 2002.

#### THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT IN ORGANIZING VOLUNTEERS

Legitimizing the contributions of volunteers has little meaning if people cannot be mobilized to volunteer. Communities must organize willing volunteers into groups that can provide services to people who need them. This organization has three necessary steps. First, new members must be recruited to replace those who leave or expand an organization—potential volunteers must be matched with volunteer organizations. Second, those in need of services must be matched with organizations that can serve their needs. Finally, organizations must continually reassess how well they are serving the community. If a service is no longer needed, is needed in greater volume, or is needed in a different form, the organization must adjust its mission to remain relevant. By remaining relevant, the volunteers retain and reinforce the legitimacy of their work and pass on norms of civic responsibility onto succeeding generations.

Volunteer firefighters and volunteer welfare commissioners are recruited using a similar process. When there is an opening and a replacement candidate has been identified, the unit chief will ask someone close to the

prospective volunteer such as a parent, sibling, senior classmate, or neighborhood association president to recruit that person for the volunteer position. The community resident is then advised that it is a duty to accept the volunteer position and serve the community, and he or she capitulates. Then, through the process of participation, the volunteer becomes socialized into the group and internalizes the value of the work. In time, these volunteers then take their turn and pressure others to join and fulfill their civic duty. In this way, with some adjustments, the norm of participation is passed on to successive generations, and the volunteer organizations continue to serve their community.

Once a mechanism for recruiting new members has been established, the volunteer organization must find ways to serve those in need. For response to fires, the process is largely automated: A resident sees a fire and calls an emergency telephone number, the city fire department sounds the alarm and relays the radio message to the appropriate station, and the volunteer firefighters respond. Matching elderly who need assistance with people who can help is not as straightforward as relaying a radio message to a fire truck. Utilizing the national family registry, the city government identifies elderly who are living alone as perhaps needing special assistance and gives this information to the volunteer welfare commissioners. The government also receives calls and visits from elderly residents who may then be referred to the appropriate volunteer welfare commissioner for assistance.

In addition to recruiting new volunteers and serving those in need, volunteer organizations must constantly reexamine their service missions to remain relevant. Responding to the earthquake disaster in nearby Kobe, Kashihara took the opportunity to reexamine its own disaster prevention activities. Because the city is so geographically compact, city firefighters nearly always reach the fire scene first, and volunteer firefighters have been relegated to assistance and clean-up roles. However, with the new interest in supporting disaster prevention, the volunteer fire department had an opportunity to expand its mission to serve a new need. Volunteer firefighters now monitor evacuation drills, demonstrate fire extinguisher operations, and teach basic first aid to local disaster prevention groups (Sakata Chiku Shoubou Kumiai Shoubou Honbu, 2001; Sandashi Shoubou Honbu, 2001).

Volunteer welfare commissioners also have an elaborate system of cooperation with the city government to gain feedback concerning citizen needs. If a neighborhood resident contacts a volunteer welfare commissioner for assistance, the volunteer will help negotiate with the city bureaucracy to obtain the appropriate assistance. Every month all the volunteer welfare commissioners in a district meet together to share problems and concerns and raise issues that need to be brought to the city's attention. They also submit monthly reports on their activities (keeping the individual identities of clients confidential), so the city is able to gather information on the kinds of problems residents are facing. The city compiles the information and identifies trends, which are then reported back to the volunteers. Constant interaction between the volunteers

and the city officials enables both sides to meet the needs of city residents and adjust services to adapt to changing conditions (Kashihara Shakai Fukushi Kyougikai, 2002; Sandashi Minsei'in Jidou'i'n Kyougikai, 2001, n.d.).

The organizational mechanisms for the elder care volunteer groups in Social Welfare Councils are different from volunteer firefighters or welfare commissioners. Rather than relying on pressure exerted by preexisting social networks, these groups rely largely on the initiative of individuals who come forward because they are interested in the mission or activities of the organization. The Social Welfare Council advertises the activities of and posts recruitment notices for registered volunteer groups in its monthly newsletter, and interested people call to inquire. A paid-staff volunteer coordinator in the Social Welfare Council often fields the phone calls from prospective volunteers and prospective clients who need services and matches them with the appropriate organization. When this quasi-governmental organization performs these administrative tasks, it frees volunteers and their organizations to spend their time serving the clients. The irony of this arrangement is that, instead of the civic groups acting as a pipeline to communicate citizen needs to the government, government employees are the ones communicating citizen needs to the volunteer groups.

Of the three kinds of support, organizational support varied the most widely between the three cities and appeared to be the most important. Kashihara dedicated considerable personnel resources to assisting volunteers and their organizations (20 part-time liaisons to work with volunteer fire departments and 25 staff members to work with volunteers dealing with elder care and social welfare). Of particular importance was the way that civic activists as well as city employees in Kashihara utilized the forum of the Social Welfare Council to facilitate coordination and cooperation between volunteer groups, particularly between older and newer groups. They used the Social Welfare Council as a forum where they could brainstorm new ideas for service provision, plan jointly sponsored projects, and coordinate service delivery.

The organizational support in Kashihara contrasted sharply with Sakata. Sakata also had staff (four people) dedicated to help volunteer fire departments and also had staff helping other volunteers (six were dedicated to working with traditional organizations and three worked in the Volunteer Promotion Center to assist newer organizations). It also had a Social Welfare Council, but Sakata's council acted to separate the activities of older and newer volunteer groups rather than facilitating their cooperation. The volunteer coordinator in Sakata provided social work advice, but he did not field phone calls from prospective volunteers to match them with organizations related to their interests; that job was rotated among a pool of volunteers from registered groups. The organizational support in Sanda lay somewhere in between the other two cities; it dedicated some resources to volunteer organizations (two staff to volunteer fire departments and five full-time and five part-time staff for social welfare and elder care) thereby supporting their work but not particularly enhancing or hindering cooperation between different groups.



#### THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNITY AND GOVERNMENT IN FUNDING VOLUNTEERS

Although volunteers may be offering free labor to their communities, the services they supply do not come without costs. There are generally two kinds of financial support that the government or social institutions can give to the volunteers and their organizations. The first is direct funding, money, or equipment. The second is through indirect means by offering services that the volunteers would have to purchase elsewhere if they were not provided such as insurance benefits or meeting space. State funding frees the volunteers from the burden of fundraising and enables them to concentrate their efforts on providing the service, but it may also reduce the opportunities for volunteer organizations to interact with the public. Surprisingly, higher levels of public funding do not necessarily mean that a volunteer organization is more beholden to the state. In this study, the community-based organizations that were fully funded by the state also had the strongest negotiating power.

The Japanese government has given significant direct funding to volunteer fire departments; municipalities cover the majority (90% to 100%) of costs with some help from the central government. Although the amount of funding varies by department, the city usually provides the firehouses, trucks, hoses, uniforms, and other necessary equipment. The volunteer units may also receive small, additional funds for extra hoses and other equipment from their local neighborhood association, but the amount of these extra funds is usually 10% or less of the total budget. In addition to equipment, the volunteer units also receive cash to cover maintenance and entertainment costs. The Fire Bureau of the national government sets guidelines for the allowances, but the actual amount is determined by municipal statute and therefore varies widely.<sup>11</sup> Although this money appears in budgets as allowances given to individual firefighters, the money is usually pooled for use by the unit as a whole for such purposes as cleaning supplies for the firehouse or going out for food and beer together after a drill session. In addition to direct funding for equipment, municipalities also provide insurance benefits for volunteer firefighters. The Fire Defense Organization Law requires municipalities to compensate volunteer firefighters or their families for death and disability incurred as a result of injury or illness sustained on official duty and must pay them a retirement allowance.

The funding system for volunteer welfare commissioners is very similar to the one supporting volunteer firefighters. The Volunteer Welfare Commissioner Law requires the prefectures to cover the costs associated with the volunteer commissioner work, and volunteers are paid a lump sum to cover costs such as transportation to client meetings, copies, postage, phone calls, and so forth. Unlike volunteer firefighters, volunteer welfare commissioners do not receive money from the state when they retire; this stipend is the extent of the direct funding they receive. In terms of indirect benefits, volunteer welfare commissioners receive public insurance coverage while they are serving.

They also have full use of public buildings to hold their monthly meetings, meet with clients, and so forth. City officials produce all of the training materials for the volunteers and print any information to be circulated to clients. Therefore, just as in the case of the volunteer firefighters, the state covers all the nonlabor costs of providing this service, and the volunteers do not have to spend time raising money to fund their activities.<sup>12</sup>

The funding for volunteers in groups registered with Social Welfare Councils comes from a combination of public and private sources. The city provides funding through grant programs to groups registered with the Social Welfare Council.<sup>13</sup> Social Welfare Council volunteer organizations generally get most of their funding from member fees, usually in the form of small (1,000 yen; about U.S.\$8), annual dues. These membership fees are viewed as analogous to dues paid to a hobby club. The volunteers recognize that both types of activities are a form of leisure in which it is reasonable to be asked to pay to participate. Larger organizations may also raise money through charity events such as flea markets or benefit concerts.

Although these organizations are less reliant on government funding than their community-based counterparts, they are often more beholden to the government. Because they are not performing services viewed as vital by the government such as firefighting or certifying disabilities, city officials are less concerned about the continued viability of any one of these organizations. Furthermore, these organizations usually have little or no administrative capacity, so they rely entirely on the state to connect them to clients and new volunteers. As a result, these small organizations are sometimes limited to providing what the state thinks is appropriate. For example, the leadership in Rainbo was thinking about expanding its services beyond the Sanda city borders to serve the elderly and handicapped in neighboring towns. However, city officials were not interested in this proposal, so it did not move forward.

All three cities offered considerable funding to volunteer organizations. Of particular note is the volunteer promotion grant program in Sakata. This program grants up to 28,000,000 yen (about U.S.\$215,000) to as many as nine volunteer organizations in the form of matching grants. The grant supports new initiatives, as opposed to ongoing programs, on a one-time basis. These grants have particularly targeted newer organizations to promote the creation and expansion of nonprofit activities in the city. Unfortunately, Sakata's funding support was not sufficient to overcome its weakness in organizational support thus leaving Kashihara as the city with the highest volunteer participation rate among the three cities I investigated.

#### A VOLUNTEERING COMMUNITY

Of the three cities, Kashihara had the most active volunteer participation. Whereas the other two cities experienced stagnation or decline in the number of volunteer firefighters, its department grew by 79%.<sup>14</sup> It had the largest

number of volunteer welfare commissioners (229 compared to Sanda's 199 and Sakata's 182). Finally, more than twice as many Kashihara residents volunteered for volunteer organizations in the Social Welfare Council than in either of the other two cities (3,546 compared to Sanda's 1,289 and Sakata's 1,496).

Kashihara's high level of volunteer participation was a direct result of the high level of legitimating, organizing, and funding support offered by the community. Perhaps most important in Kashihara was the organizational support received by the volunteer organizations. The government provided many organizational resources—meeting space, leadership and practical skills trainings, and coordination of projects. Twenty-five staff members (up from only three in 1994) were dedicated to assisting welfare-related volunteers. City employees as well as civic activists energetically utilized the Social Welfare Council as a forum to forge connections between community-based organizations and smaller volunteer groups thereby facilitating the efficient use of resources and expanding the network of volunteers available for projects. The neighborhood associations enjoyed a very high membership rate (93% of households were members as opposed to 85% in Sanda and 87% in Sakata), so they were able to utilize their vast network to enhance the volunteer recruiting as well as the public relations for these community projects. These organizational supports were then supplemented by extensive funding from both public and private sources.

## CONCLUSION

This article began by asking three questions: Why are some communities more civically engaged than others, why do some communities provide services with volunteer labor whereas others rely primarily on government provision, and when communities provide both volunteer and paid labor for the same service, how do they motivate and organize those volunteers?

The answers to these questions developed in this article have theoretical, methodological, and empirical significance. Theoretically, the model introduced here suggests that volunteer participation should be conceptualized as more than just the function of an individual choice; community factors, in particular the legitimizing, organizing, and funding support of governmental and social institutions, are also critical in determining the level of volunteer participation in a community. Furthermore, it is not just the institutional structures, for example, a law giving special status to volunteers or a Social Welfare Council, that are primarily important but, rather, the *practices* of governmental and social actors within those institutions. All three cities had Social Welfare Councils, but the practices of civic activists and city officials varied widely; Kashihara actively utilized the forum to coordinate between different volunteer groups resulting in very high participation rates. Thus, in theorizing about volunteer participation, it is important to examine community-level

factors in addition to individual-level factors and the practices of governmental and social actors as well as the institutions in which they are embedded.

Calling for greater attention to community influences on volunteering behavior follows classic studies of volunteering, such as James Lincoln's 1977 research that examined regional variation in volunteering patterns as well as how organizational density affected the formation of new civic organizations. More recent works, such as Gronbjerg and Paarlberg (2001), have begun testing the relevant theories to explain nonprofit density at the community level. This study furthers this effort to examine community-level influences on civic engagement to supplement what we are discovering about the importance of individual-level factors.

Methodologically, this study shows the value of a nested research design that combines both quantitative and qualitative analysis at multiple levels of analysis to examine volunteering patterns.<sup>15</sup> In this case, the statistical analysis demonstrated the inadequacy of conventional explanations for explaining community-level variation in volunteer participation rates, and in-depth case studies were able to illuminate the causal mechanisms suggested by my theory.

Finally, this study provides two important empirical insights. First, the study highlights the importance of state-society interactions and cooperation in facilitating volunteer cooperation. Although I have concentrated on the services of firefighting and elder care, there is every reason to believe that the general findings about the importance of legitimizing, organizing, and funding support would hold for other service and activity areas. Neighborhood associations are engaged in a wide variety of areas from elder care to youth activities to environmental clean-up, and in many cases, these local groups work with other issue-specific groups and the government to promote volunteer participation in both leisure activities (e.g., a local baseball league) as well as public service activities (e.g., a clean-the-local-river day).

Second, this study draws attention to the important role that traditional, community-based organizations such as neighborhood associations, volunteer welfare commissioners, and volunteer firefighters play in providing valuable services to their communities in Japan. There has been considerable recent research on newer, incorporated nonprofit organizations since the outpouring of volunteers following the 1995 earthquake in Kobe and the 1998 passage of the new nonprofit organization law easing nonprofit incorporation restrictions. However, most of these studies have ignored the vibrant volunteer participation in more traditional groups and underestimated the importance of these local organizations in providing services and transmitting community norms of volunteer participation (e.g., Pekkanen, 2000; Reimann, 2003; Yamamoto, 1999).

By focusing on traditional, community-based volunteers such as volunteer firefighters, volunteer welfare commissioners, and neighborhood association members, I am attempting to answer and reiterate the call of David Horton

Smith (2000) to expand the study of volunteers and their organizations away from large, paid-staff nonprofits to include a closer examination of grassroots community organizations. Expanding the study of nonprofits and volunteering to include these community-based groups increases knowledge of the diversity of ways that volunteers work in their communities and interact with the government.

A community-based perspective is particularly important as municipal (and national) governments struggle to provide services in the face of increasingly serious budget crises. This study highlights some mechanisms that city employees and civic activists can use to encourage volunteer participation thus enhancing the delivery of services in their communities. It is the practices of the state and society—how well they legitimize, fund, and organize volunteers—that determine the level of volunteer participation in a community. This community-based perspective opens up new avenues for thinking about the roles of volunteer organizations in democracies and points to concrete ways that citizens can improve volunteer participation in their own communities.

## Appendix Measurements and Sources

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### DEPENDENT VARIABLES

- Volunteer firefighters: volunteer firefighters per capita (Soumushou Shoubouchou, 2000, p. 52).
- Volunteer welfare commissioners: volunteer welfare commissioners per capita in 2000 (Koseisho, 2000, p. 262).
- Seniors club participation: number of seniors club members per capita calculated by dividing the number of seniors clubs by the population (number of seniors clubs from Koseisho, 2000, p. 250).
- Average percent of people who volunteered social services in 2000 (NHK Housou Bunka Kenkyujyo, 2000).
- Average number of hours volunteered among those who volunteered social services in 2002 (NHK Housou Bunka Kenkyujyo, 2000).
- Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) members: PTA membership per capita in 2001 calculated by dividing the number of PTA members by the population (PTA membership from Japan National PTA Association, 2002).
- Nonprofit organizations: number of nonprofit organizations per capita in 2000 calculated by dividing the number of nonprofits with founding dates before December 31, 2000, by the population (Japan NPO Center, 2001; this database operates through voluntary reporting, so underreporting is very likely).

## INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

- Education: percentage of high school graduates who go on to higher education in 2000 (Japan Statistical Yearbook, 2002a, Table 20-22). The figures are given for men and for women. I calculated the figure for the prefecture by averaging the two.
  - Income: per capita income by prefecture in 1998 (Japan Statistical Yearbook, 2002b, Table 4-14).
  - Population density: population per square kilometer 2000 calculated using population and geographic size information (Soumushou Shoubouchou, 2000, p. 52).
  - Percent of population working in the primary sector in 2000 (Yanotsuneta Kinenkai, 2002, p. 155).
  - Working women: percent of women in the workforce in 1997 (Yanotsuneta Kinenkai, 2002, p. 159).
  - TV viewing: average hours of TV viewing (NHK Housou Bunka Kenkyujyo, 2000).
  - Government spending: per capita government spending 1999 calculated by dividing total government spending by the population (Yanotsuneta Kinenkai, 2002, p. 283).
  - Career firefighters: career firefighters per capita calculated by dividing the number of career firefighters by the population (Soumushou Shoubouchou, 1990, p. 50; 2000, p. 52).
  - Home helpers: home helpers per capita in 1999 calculated by dividing the number of home helpers by the population (Naraken Minsei Jidou'iin Rengokai, 2001, p. 312).
  - Cases of fire per capita in 2000 (Yanotsuneta Kinenkai, 2002, p. 354).
  - Proportion of population older than 65 in 2000 (Yanotsuneta Kinenkai, 2002, p. 135).
  - Per capita number of schools in 2001 (Japan National PTA Association, 2002).
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## Notes

1. For an excellent review of the literature on characteristics that promote volunteer participation in individuals, see D. Smith (1994) who examined contextual, social background, personality, attitude, and situational variables. D. Smith (2000) also provided a number of very detailed literature reviews of work on volunteering.

2. The value 0.5 is a strict noncollinearity standard, which I utilized because my interest is in capturing the independent effects of these variables. In cases where the variables were highly correlated, I tested the variables separately.

3. For more information on each of the cities, see Sanda city's homepage ([www.city.sanda.hyogo.jp/](http://www.city.sanda.hyogo.jp/) in Japanese or [www.city.sanda.hyogo.jp/eigo%20new/profile/profile.html](http://www.city.sanda.hyogo.jp/eigo%20new/profile/profile.html) in English), Kashihara's homepage ([www.city.kashihara.nara.jp/gaiyo/gaiyou.html](http://www.city.kashihara.nara.jp/gaiyo/gaiyou.html) in

Japanese), and Sakata's homepage ([www.city.sakata.yamagata.jp/](http://www.city.sakata.yamagata.jp/) in Japanese or [www.city.sakata.yamagata.jp/e/](http://www.city.sakata.yamagata.jp/e/) in English).

4. Only 17 of the 3,258 municipalities in Japan (0.5%) have no volunteer fire department (Soumushou Shoubouchou, 2000). The Fire and Disaster Management Agency of Japan keeps current statistics and information on the state of volunteer firefighters nationwide ([www.fdma.go.jp/syobodan/arekore.html](http://www.fdma.go.jp/syobodan/arekore.html) in Japanese).

5. See Takahashi and Hashimoto (1997), Goodman (1998), and Renkei (1991, 1992) for an overview of the volunteer welfare commissioner system and its history. In 1999, volunteer welfare commissioners dealt with more than 7 million cases related to the elderly—three times as many cases as the handicapped, youth, and poor combined (Koseisho Daishikanbo Tokei Hokokubu, 2000, pp. 278-279; see also the Ministry of Health and Welfare Statistics at [www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/gyousei/00/index.html](http://www.mhlw.go.jp/toukei/saikin/hw/gyousei/00/index.html) in Japanese).

6. For more about the Social Welfare Councils in Japan, see the home page of the national organization ([www.shakyo.or.jp/](http://www.shakyo.or.jp/) in Japanese and [www.shakyo.or.jp/cdvc/zenvc.htm](http://www.shakyo.or.jp/cdvc/zenvc.htm) in Japanese).

7. In a seminal study of Japan, one anthropologist emphasized the importance of daily contact between neighbors as being more important than blood ties of family (Nakane, 1970, p. 137).

8. See Yamamoto (1998, p. 13). The number of people is calculated as 90% of the total population given in the government census data (Statistics Bureau, 2001). These findings were consistent with my research; the membership in neighborhood associations in the three cities I studied ranged from 85% (Sanda) to 93% (Kashihara).

9. See the 1947 Fire Defense Organization Law, the 1948 Welfare Commissioner Law, and the 1950 Daily Life Protection Law for the specifics on the legal status and protections granted to these volunteers.

10. Between 1968 and 2001, the proportion of salaried men among the volunteer firefighters jumped from 26.5% to 68.5%. Although 99% of volunteer firefighters are still men, the number of women jumped from 1,923 to 10,176, or 429%, from 1990 to 2000 (Statistics Bureau, 2002).

11. For example, the 2000 national guidelines suggested that a volunteer fire chief receive 79,000 yen (about U.S.\$607) per year, but in Sanda, the chief received 148,700 yen, whereas in Kashihara the chief received only 14,200 yen (Kashihara Shigikai, 1996; Sandashi Shoubou Honbu, 2001; Soumushou Shoubouchou, 2001).

12. The volunteer welfare commissioners, along with many other volunteers, participate in Japan's annual "red flower" fundraising campaign. Money collected is aggregated together at the national level and then redistributed through Social Welfare Councils across Japan.

13. These grants can range in size from very small—one organization in Sanda receives 40,000 yen (about U.S.\$300; Gaishu Kaijyo Borantia "Kakehashi," 2002, p. 7)—to quite large—Sakata has a grant program with 28,000,000 yen (about U.S.\$215,000) that provides matching funds for up to nine organizations each year.

14. Note that it had the smallest volunteer fire department in terms of overall numbers—only 258 volunteer firefighters compared to Sakata's 1,219 and Sanda's 704. This is because the size of the city (25 square miles rather than 100 or more in the other two cities) meant that the city fire department could serve the whole city, and the volunteers performed mostly cleanup and support roles as well as disaster prevention education outreach.

15. See Lieberman (2003) for an excellent discussion of the value of a nested research design in cross-national research.

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