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Mobilized or Civic Minded

Factors Affecting the Political Participation of Senior Citizens

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Using Hong Kong as a case study, this article addresses whether senior citizens are rational in their voting behavior, whether they are mobilized by political parties to participate in elections, and whether they are enabled or constrained in fulfilling their political responsibilities and asserting their political rights. The findings of a recent study were presented to examine the extent to which senior citizens' political participation is determined by rationality, political knowledge, political mobilization, and constraint and enabling factors. Seven composite scales measuring senior citizens' political participation, sense of civic-mindedness, self-interest orientation, political knowledge, political mobilization, and constraining and enabling factors were constructed and validated in the study. Statistical analyses show that political knowledge, political mobilization, and enabling factors were most influential in affecting senior citizens' level of political participation. The article also compares the responses of elderly persons who are members of senior centers with those of ordinary senior citizens.

Despite some previous research work (Bazargan, Kang, and Bazargan 1991; Peterson and Maiden 1993; Peterson and Somit 1994), the absolute and relative influences of mobilization, self-interest orientation, civic-mindedness, political knowledge, organizational enablement, and physical and mental constraints on the senior citizen's political participation are not yet clearly known. No study has examined all

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these factors simultaneously to disentangle their net effects. Nevertheless, each of these factors is potentially significant according to various theoretical and empirical endeavors. Understanding their influence is an essential step to elucidating the nature of senior citizens' political participation.

The electoral participation of senior citizens in many countries is not low when compared with that of the younger population. Old age is not a time of political quiescence (Ward 1979). Older people represent a large segment of the voting society with the result that potentially they have a great deal of voting strength (Ward 1979; Cutler 1983). However, these general statements do not describe senior citizens' political clout accurately, because they are heterogeneous in interests, knowledge, civic orientation, physical and mental constraints, and others factors relevant to political participation (Peterson and Somit 1994). This calls for focused research on senior citizens to unfold the heterogeneous influences on their political participation. Such research could provide answers to the following questions: the role of senior citizens' self-interest orientation for electoral participation (Rhodebeck 1993); whether senior citizens are rational in their voting behavior, that is, whether they themselves decide to vote and for whom to vote or whether they are mobilized by political parties or some other organizations without seriously considering the implications of their behavior; whether they are enabled to participate politically; or whether they are free or constrained in fulfilling their political responsibilities and asserting their political rights.

Political participation is of special concern to newly democratizing societies such as Hong Kong. Democratization has become an important theme of political transformation in Hong Kong since the advocacy for representative government in the early 1980s and particularly since 1991 when people have been able to elect their representatives in the legislature. Debates concerning the pace and conditions of democratization still continue in Hong Kong. Critics of the rapid democratization are suspicious of the rational base of the democratic participation of Hong Kong people, especially of senior citizens. They worry that senior citizens are so vulnerable to the mobilization and manipulation of certain political organizations that their votes and actions do not reflect their self-interests or civic-mindedness. Hence, it is a critical time to review the influence of the various factors on senior citizens' political (and electoral) participation.

Using Hong Kong as a case study, this article addresses the aforementioned questions by presenting the findings of a recent study that aimed at, first, identifying senior citizens' involvement in voting and other forms of political participation; second, finding out to what extent senior citizens' political participation is determined by self-interest, civic-mindedness, political knowledge, political mobilization, and constraining and enabling factors; and third, establishing whether the political participation of the elderly in senior centers is different from that of those who lived in the community.

Conceptual Framework

In a study by Bazargan et al. (1991), senior citizens' turnout in the United States was found to be affected by their health, life satisfaction, income, education, marital status, club association, participation in volunteer work, living arrangement, and ideology. Health or functional ability was found to be a personal constraint. Income was another constraint, with the result that senior citizens with higher incomes were more likely to turn out to vote than senior citizens with lower incomes. On the other hand, social service centers helped to empower senior citizens by encouraging them to vote. Bazargan et al. (1991:196) did not find transportation inadequacy to be a significant constraint on senior citizens' turnout.

Using donations of money to parties and candidates as a measure of senior citizens' political participation, Peterson and Maiden (1993) and Jennings and Markus (1988) found that their participation was affected by such factors as civic orientation, education, age, and sex in the United States. Higher levels of civic orientation in senior citizens promoted political participation. Highly educated senior citizens participated more. Age affected participation negatively. Participation was higher among male senior citizens than female ones.

This lack of a coherent picture of the factors affecting senior citizens' political participation is a reflection of the picture concerning the political participation of the general electorate. Different research projects examined different factors so that we have a segmented rather than a comprehensive understanding of the issue. Thus, the turnout of the electorate has been found to be increased by such factors as political efficacy (Gibson 1993), political interest (Fife-Schaw and

Breakwell 1990), civic competence (Strate et al. 1989), civic awareness (Gilbert 1993:56), civic duty (Aldrich 1993:258), and political knowledge (Kennamer 1990). It has also been shown that organizational involvement (Goel 1980:120), organizational membership (Boiney and Paletz 1991), group membership and leadership (Rapoport, Stone, and Abramowitz 1991), church attendance (Strate et al. 1989), religious affiliation (Gilbert 1993:172; Wald, Owen, and Hill 1990:197), mass media (Bartels 1993), and campaign spending (Patterson and Caldeira 1983) in the United States, and living in public housing (Louie 1993:27) in Hong Kong affect the public's voter turnout. Furthermore, party identification has been consistently found to be an important determinant of Americans' voter turnout (Aldrich and Simon 1986:284; Miller and Asp 1985:235).

The above research suggests that the political participation of senior citizens is affected by numerous factors. Different pieces of research focused on different factors, with the result that they have not provided a clear and comprehensive theoretical framework to conceptualize the influential factors. Our conceptual framework (see Figure 1) makes use of the above findings to draw up a list of five factors as central to the political participation of senior citizens: rationality, political knowledge, political mobilization, and enabling versus constraining factors. Rationality, subdivided into civic-mindedness and self-interest, and political knowledge are considered as the internal driving forces for political participation, whereas political mobilization and enabling factors act upon senior citizens externally. The constraining factor is both an internal and an external factor. The operationalization of these factors is outlined as follows.

Rationality

Rationality refers to an individual's making judicious decisions, based on available information, to either satisfy personal interests (for oneself and others) or realize societal values (Kalberg 1980). As regards rationality in terms of realization of self-interests, theory and research have constructed such models as spatial and directional models (Grofman 1987; MacDonald and Rabinowitz 1993), retrospective and prospective models (Fiorina 1990), and other sophisticated models of political participation (Aldrich 1993; Bennett and Salisbury 1987). These models involve the individual's calculation of either

expected future benefits pertaining to participation (e.g., electing a particular candidate) or perceived benefits of past participation (a certain politician was placed in office). Nevertheless, these models merely assume the importance and relevance of self-interest orientation without measuring it explicitly. The present study attempts to gauge senior citizen's self-interest orientation and to examine how far it influences political participation.

Regarding civic-mindedness as a manifestation of rationality (Sigelman et al. 1985; Bazargan, Barbre, and Torres-Gill 1992), research tends to show a positive effect on political participation (Almond and Verba [1963] 1989; Bazargan et al. 1992; Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Peterson and Maiden 1993; Strate et al. 1989; Sigelman et al. 1985). However, a recent study in Hong Kong (Louie and Wan 1993) failed to do so probably because its measure of civic-mindedness was unreliable. The present study therefore examines the contribution of civic-mindedness with, hopefully, a more reliable and adequate measure.

In this research, both of these orientations of rationality were used. The rationality that is characterized by self-interest suggests that senior citizens, when participating politically, place their personal interests ahead of societal and civic values (Sears and Funk 1991). On the other hand, rationality in terms of civic-mindedness refers to the adherence to civic duty (civic-mindedness) as a way to realize socially desirable values. Such values may include those supportive of democracy, representative government, election, and turning out to vote in the election.

Political Knowledge

The political knowledge factor refers to the understanding of the political system and the present political structures.

Political Mobilization

The political mobilization factor refers to contacts with political parties and electoral lieutenants, persuasion by politicians and campaign activities, and influence by political opinions, ideology, and political participation of friends and family.

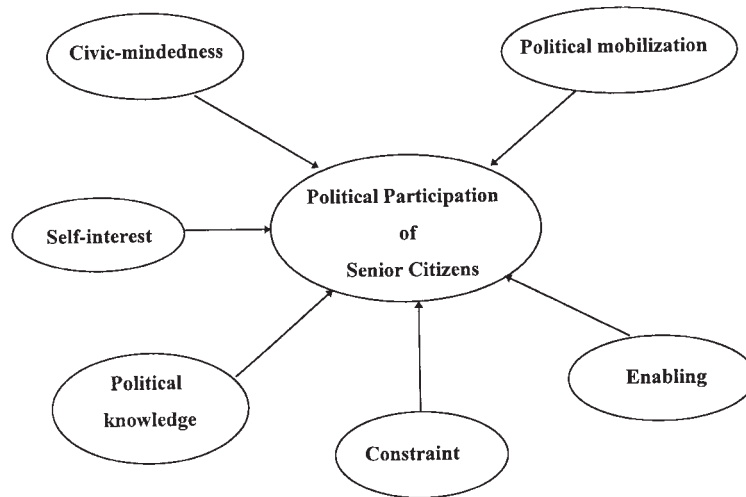


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for the Political Participation of Senior Citizens

Enabling

The enabling factor refers to civic education, membership and leadership in community organizations (including senior centers, churches, residents' organizations), voluntary work experiences, and awareness of public affairs.

Constraint

The constraint factor includes ill-health, poor functional ability, low income, and problems of transportation and accessibility.

Methodology

RESEARCH DESIGN AND SAMPLING

A cross-sectional survey design was used in this research. A multi-stage cluster sampling procedure was employed to select the respondents. A nonproportional sampling procedure was also used to

purposively oversample strata with a low population so as to obtain sufficient variance. It was intended to collect a total of 1,000 Chinese senior citizens in Hong Kong, aged 60 or above, through two channels: 500 members of senior centers and 500 noncenter members at their homes. The senior center member respondents were randomly selected from 15 senior centers, which included 3 day care centers, 3 multiservice centers, and 9 social centers for the elderly located in urban areas and new towns. The household or noncenter member respondents were sampled randomly with the help of the Census and Statistics Department. They came from the households in the public housing and private buildings in areas of urban centers and new towns, and households in village areas. The total number of interviewed senior citizens was 831—342 for households and 489 for centers. The overall response rate was 83.1% (68% for the former and 98% for the latter). A postsurvey adjustment was made to weigh the data to recover the original distribution in the population. To best represent the population of senior citizens, descriptive presentation, and reliability, factor and regression analyses that follow used the weighted data to obtain statistical results.

INSTRUMENTS

A structured questionnaire written in Chinese was used for the interviews. Seven composite scales measuring senior citizens' political participation, sense of civic-mindedness, self-interest orientation, political knowledge, political mobilization, and constraining and enabling factors were constructed and validated in the research. They are described below (see appendix).

Political Participation Scale. The Verba and Nie's Index of Political Participation (Peterson and Somit 1992) was used and adapted to construct the Political Participation Scale. It consists of 13 items that measure respondents' voter turnout, party membership, and formal and informal political activities. This scale includes three components of political participation, namely, voting (three items) and conventional (nine items) and unconventional (one item) political participation. Conventional political participation means participation in legitimate and socially acceptable political activities, whereas unconventional political participation refers to participating in activities using noninstitutionalized and less acceptable means.

Civic-Mindedness Scale. Using the Civic Duty Scale by Leighley (1991), a 10-item Civic-Minded Scale was constructed to indicate respondents' political trust, public interest, and civic responsibility. Examples of the items used are, "Every citizen should be concerned with public affairs"; "Seeing things that hurt the community interest, one should oppose them."

Self-Interest Scale. This is a six-item scale that was constructed by drawing from the Privatism Index by Peterson (1990). The items measure one's perceived instrumentality, usefulness, and worthiness of political participation. Examples of the items used are, "You only support the policy that benefits you personally"; "The goal of voting is to protect one's interests."

Political Knowledge Scale. This is a seven-item scale that was constructed by the researchers. An example of the items is, "The Legislative Council has no appointed members now."

Political Mobilization Scale. This scale was constructed by the researchers. It is composed of 10 items, measuring respondents' contact with political parties and politicians and participation in political activities by being persuaded or urged by politicians, family members, friends, and organizations. An example of the items is, "In the past year, have you been urged or brought in a car by candidates to vote in an election?"

Enabling Scale. This scale was constructed by making use of the findings of previous relevant studies (Peterson and Maiden 1993; Jennings and Markus 1988; Gilbert 1993; Goel 1980; Boiney and Paletz 1991; Bartels 1993; Sherbourne and Stewart 1991). It is a composite scale comprising six indicators. They include participation in community organizations (one item), holding office in a community organization (one item), learning from civic education (five items), diversity in information seeking (five items), learning from senior centers or community organization (one item), and receiving social support (four items). These items were conceptually and semantically unrelated to political participation, which referred to specific actions for political purposes (see appendix). Hence, there would not be conceptual overlap and thereby tautological error between the independent and the dependent variable.

Constraint Scale. This was constructed by making use of the findings of the studies by Bazargan et al. (1992), Chappell (1981), and

Radloff (1977). Five predictors are included in the scale: transportation problems (one item), disability (two items), illness (four items), financial problems (three items), and depressive affect (five items).

Reliabilities of Composite Measures

Except for political participation and political knowledge, all the composite measures were the means of their constituent items, based on an assumption that the items and their underlying constructs were linearly related. They were developed from the literature or adapted from other validated scales. Table 1 shows that except for the self-interest scale, all of them attained satisfactory levels in reliability tests (see appendix for corrected item-total correlations for the items).

Political participation, or the underlying construct of political activism to the participation items, however, was likely to be related in a sigmoid, logistic way with different thresholds for different items. In mathematical expression (Baker 1992), the relationship between political activism and a participation item is

$$p_i = g_i + \frac{1 - g_i}{1 + \exp(-d_i(A - t_i))}.$$

Where p_i is the dichotomous score of a participation item, g_i is a parameter representing guessing, d_i is a parameter representing discrimination, t_i is a parameter representing the threshold or difficulty, and A is the underlying tendency of political activism. Hence, the relationship underscored a three-parameter model that specifies parameters to represent guessing, discrimination, and difficulty.

This model implies that an act likely occurs when it is highly related to the underlying tendency of political activism, is not difficult, or is vulnerable to guessing. In terms of marginal likelihood estimation (Thissen 1991), such a three-parameter logistic model identified a reliable measure of political participation or activism, with varying degrees of discrimination and difficulty in its items. Table 2 shows that voting in the 1995 Legislative Council election was least difficult, whereas voting in the 1994 District Board election and the 1995 Municipal Council election came next in level of

TABLE 1
Reliability of the Measuring Scales

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Number of Items</i>	<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>
Civic-mindedness	10	0.759
Self-interest	6	0.365
Political mobilization	10	0.656
Enabling (six predictors)		
1. Participation in community organizations	1	—
2. Holding office in community organizations	1	—
3. Learning from civic education	5	0.611
4. Diversity in information seeking	5	0.652
5. Learning from senior center and organizations	1	—
6. Received social support	4	0.618
Constraint (five predictors)		
1. Transportation problem	1	—
2. Disability	2	0.758
3. Illness	4	0.825
4. Financial problem	3	0.629
5. Depressive affect	5	0.773

difficulty. On the other hand, attending activities of political organizations was most difficult or unlikely, and its discrimination power was correspondingly low. Participation in such an activity indicated a high level of political activism. Attending election forums and voting in the 1994 District Board election were most discriminative or most reflective of political activism. Guess factors for all the participation items were low, indicating that they tended to be actual behavior recalled rather than guessed retrospectively. These parameter estimates were all theoretically meaningful and reasonable, thus underscoring the validity of the measure of political participation.

Another three-parameter logistic model applied to the measurement of political knowledge. As shown in Table 3, the knowledge that "Mrs. Anson Chan is not the Financial Secretary in Hong Kong" was the easiest, while "Legislative Council members cannot remain as members unconditionally after July 1997" proved the most difficult. Whereas the former was most discriminative, the latter was least discriminative or reflective of political knowledge. There was no portion due to guessing. The reliability of the composite measure of political knowledge was satisfactory.

TABLE 2
Reliability of the Political Participation
Scale by the Three-Parameter Logistic Model

	<i>Discrimination</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Guess</i>
Conventional participation			
Attended meetings to improve the community	1.64*	2.33*	0.05*
Attended election forums	2.19*	2.34*	0.01*
Helped in the campaign	1.40*	2.60*	0.00*
Was a party member	1.41	3.70	0.00
Persuaded others to vote for a candidate	1.05*	2.22*	0.02*
Member of a resident or community organization	1.09*	2.76*	0.01*
Attended activities of political organizations	0.85*	3.15*	0.00
Expressed opinion to government or politicians	1.73*	2.30*	0.00*
Expressed opinion to mass media	1.70*	2.76*	0.00*
Unconventional political participation: Attended signature campaigns, rallies, sit-ins, or demonstrations	1.07*	2.35*	0.03*
Voted in the 1995 Legislative Council election	1.48*	0.42*	0.00
Voted in the Municipal election	1.75*	0.89*	0.00
Voted in the 1994 District Board election	2.12*	0.76*	0.00

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed), marginal reliability = .06.

TABLE 3
Reliability of the Political Knowledge
Scale by the Three-Parameter Logistic Model

	<i>Discrimination</i>	<i>Difficulty</i>	<i>Guess</i>
District Boards cannot make laws	1.26*	1.47*	0.00
Mrs. Anson Chan is not the financial secretary in Hong Kong	1.86*	0.82*	0.00
Mr. Chu-ming Lee does not belong to the Liberal Party	1.62*	1.03*	0.00
The Legislative Council has no appointed members now	0.90*	2.03*	0.00
The chairman of the Urban Council is not Mr Wang-fat Wong	1.67*	1.46*	0.00
The Liberal Party does not have the largest number of seats in the Legislative Council now	1.39*	1.64*	0.00
Legislative Council members cannot remain as members unconditionally after July 1997	0.49*	2.69*	0.00

* $p < .05$ (two-tailed), marginal reliability = .57.

Results

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF THE RESPONDENTS

Table 4 shows that the mean age of the respondents was 70.2, and the number of females was slightly higher than that of the males. Of the respondents, 57.1% received no formal education, and almost 60% had a spouse in Hong Kong (58.7%). More than half of the respondents (53.7%) were living in rented housing, and almost half (48.6%) had a monthly income of less than Hong Kong \$2,000 (U.S.\$256).

As to the difference between the center members and nonmembers, *t* tests showed that nonmember respondents were significantly younger than center members. The nonmember group had twice as many males as the member group: 48.0% versus 20.3%. The nonmember group had fewer widowed respondents but had a larger number of respondents who owned a flat than did the center member group.

POLITICAL PARTICIPATION OF SENIOR CITIZENS

As indicated by Table 5, the voter registration and voting turnout rates of the respondents were not low. But compared to the overall rate of the general population, the registration rate of the respondents (48.7%) was significantly lower than the overall rate (65.0%). The voter turnout rate of the respondents in the two district elections was only slightly lower than the overall rate (24.4% vs. 32.5% in the District Board election and 20.8% vs. 23.1% in the Municipal election). However, the performance of the respondents in the voter turnout of the 1995 Legislation Council election (38.6%) was better and was similar to that of the overall rate (35.8%).

Regarding party affiliation, very few of the respondents had joined a political party. The great majority (89.4%) did not even support a political party. Among the parties supported, more support was granted to democratic parties. The level of their participation in political activities was also low. Less than 6% of the respondents had participated in any form of election campaign or activities related to

TABLE 4
Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Respondents (percentages)

	<i>All</i> N = 831 (831)	<i>Center Members</i> n = 68 (489)	<i>Nonmembers</i> n = 763 (342)
Age			
Mean age	70.2*	73.7	69.9
Sex			
Male	45.7*	20.3	48.0
Female	54.3	79.7	52.0
Education			
Postsecondary	2.7	2.3	2.7
Secondary	6.5	8.7	6.3
Primary	33.7	23.1	34.7
Private tutoring	12.5	16.8	12.1
No education	44.6	49.1	44.2
Marital status			
Having a spouse in Hong Kong	58.7*	41.8	60.2
Having a spouse outside Hong Kong	1.1	1.6	1.0
Divorced/separated	1.2	1.6	1.2
Widowed	27.3	48.2	25.5
Unmarried	11.6	6.8	12.1
Housing type			
Owning a flat	46.3*	21.5	48.5
Living in a rented flat	53.7	78.3	51.5
Flat provided by employer	0.0	0.2	0.0
Income (Hong Kong)			
0-2,000	48.6	57.0	47.7
2,001-4,000	33.3	27.2	34.0
>4,000	18.1	15.7	18.3

NOTE: Figure in parentheses is the unweighted *N*.

*Significantly different between members and nonmembers at the .05 level; hence, income and education were not significantly different between the two groups.

formal political structures, such as attending activities of political organizations or making representations to government and politicians. Among all the activities, persuading others to vote for a candidate (5.4%) and attending election forums (3.1%) scored the highest percentages. Participation in informal political activities was also very low, with less than 7% of the respondents participating in activities organized by community organizations or such other activities as signature campaigns, sit-ins, and expressing opinions to mass media. Center members were more likely than nonmembers to be involved in political activities.

TABLE 5
Political Participation of Senior Citizens in Hong Kong

	<i>All</i>		<i>Center Member</i>		<i>Nonmember</i>	
	%	n	%	n	%	n
Voting						
Being a registered voter	48.7	831	55.2	68	50.0	763
Voted in the 1995 Legislative Council election	34.9	831	41.1	68	34.3	763
Voted in the 1995 Municipal election	20.8	804	26.3	63	20.4	741
Voted in the 1994 District Board election	24.4	800	30.9	62	23.9	738
Voted in the 1991 Heung Yee Kuk election	10.8	792	6.9	60	11.2	732
Will vote in future	52.6	737	54.5	59	52.4	678
Party supported*						
Democratic Party	8.3	831	8.4	68	8.3	763
Association for Democracy and People's Livelihood	0.2	831	2.9	68	0.0	763
Liberal Party	0.2	831	2.0	68	0.0	763
Democratic Association for the Betterment of Hong Kong	1.5	831	1.5	68	1.5	763
Federation of Trade Union	0.4	831	0.2	68	0.4	763
None	89.4	831	85.0	68	89.8	763
Party membership	0.04	829	0.5	68	0.0	761
Participation in formal political activities						
Helped in the election campaign	1.3	828	3.9	67	1.0	761
Persuaded others to vote for a candidate	5.4	830	11.9	67	4.8	761
Attended election forums	3.1	830	5.4	67	2.9	761
Attended activities of a political organization	1.5	827	4.7	67	1.2	761
Expressed opinion to government or politicians	1.9	829	5.2	67	1.6	761
Participation in informal political activities						
Was a member of a resident or community organization	1.4	828	6.5	67	1.0	761
Attended signature campaigns, rallies, sit-ins, or demonstrations	6.9	822	8.8	67	6.8	755
Attended meetings to improve the community	6.1	830	11.1	67	5.6	763
Expressed opinions to mass media	1.1	829	2.2	67	1.0	762

NOTES: Based on weighted data.

*Significantly different between members and nonmembers at the .05 level; hence, only the party supported was significantly different between the two groups.

*ASSOCIATIONS OF POLITICAL PARTICIPATION
WITH SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS*

Table 6 shows the correlation between the level of political participation and a number of sociodemographic variables. With pooled data of members and nonmembers, all basic sociodemographic background characteristics, including class, sex, age, housing, marital status, education, and income, created significant differences in political participation. The correlations were consistent with the expectation that the senior citizen who was male, younger, richer, better educated, or in a higher class position was more active politically.

Regarding the variation between members of senior centers and nonmembers, Table 6 indicates that associations between political participation and class, sex, age, housing type, and marital status appeared to be stronger for the nonmember than for the member. The stronger association of the nonmembers might be attributable to the higher variation of the variables among nonmembers than among members, who tended to be more similar in backgrounds and political participation. Hence, the common fate of center membership would constrain and dwarf the variation and associations among the variables. However, education tended to show a higher association with political participation for the member than for the nonmember. Perhaps in the senior center, where residents were more likely to be exposed to information about political activity than those outside the center, the member had more opportunity than did the nonmember to apply his or her cognitive ability derived from education to decide whether to participate in a political activity.

*DETERMINANTS OF POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION OF SENIOR CITIZENS*

Regression analysis can identify the unique contribution of a determinant and a set of determinants on an outcome variable. As conceptualized in this research, determinants of a senior citizen's political participation included civic-mindedness, self-interest, political knowledge, mobilization, enabling, and constraint. The unique contribution of each set of determinants was the corresponding unique proportion of variance explained when regression

TABLE 6
Associations of Political Participation Among
Various Sociodemographic Categories

	<i>All</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Nonmembers</i>
Class: η	.175*	.085	.121*
Sex: r	-.186*	-.084	-.211*
Age: r	-.137*	-.047	-.160*
Housing: η	.173*	.069	.183*
Marital status: η	.173*	.075	.189*
Education: r	.199*	.233	.199*
Income: r	.183*	.182	.188*

*Significant difference among sociodemographic categories at the $p < .05$ level.

analysis controlled other determinants and predictors including background characteristics.

Regression analysis with all members and nonmembers revealed that, apart from background characteristics, political knowledge, political mobilization, and enabling factors explained most of the variance of political participation (see Table 7). Civic-mindedness and constraint factors had significant but weak effects. Self-interest, however, displayed no significant effect on senior citizens' political participation. When the number of determinants of the enabling factor and the constraint factor were adjusted by looking at individual predictors (see Table 8), it was revealed that political knowledge ($\beta = .247$) was the strongest individual predictor of political participation. Other significant positive individual predictors included political mobilization (.181), learning about civic education (.181), civic-mindedness (.103), and the diversity of information sources (.090). Significant variables that showed negative effects on political participation were financial problems (−.112) and transportation problems (−.082).

The explanation for political participation was different between members and nonmembers. While mobilization was the strongest determinant of a member's political participation, its effect was secondary to that of political knowledge and enabling in a nonmember (see Table 7). By contrast, while political knowledge was the most significant predictor of the nonmember's political participation, it did not have any significant effect for the member. Financial problems were significantly negatively related to the nonmember group only.

TABLE 7
 Percentage Variance of Members' and Nonmembers'
 Political Participation Explained by Various Factors

<i>Factor</i>	<i>Number of Predictors</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Nonmembers</i>
Civic-mindedness	1	0.80* (+)	0.79* (+)	0.73 (+)
Self-interest	1	0.04 (-)	0.33 (-)	0.05 (-)
Knowledge	1	3.24* (+)	0.01 (+)	14.75* (+)
Mobilization	1	2.38* (+)	4.53* (+)	2.01* (+)
Enabling	6	3.04* (+)	4.25* (+)	3.87* (+)
Constraint	5	1.70* (-)	0.81 (-)	1.44* (-)
Background	23-24	10.12*	6.39	11.42*
Total	38-39	40.34*	30.80*	43.25*

NOTE: (+) = positively related; (-) = negatively related.

* $p < .05$.

Regarding components of the enabling factor, learning about civic education was significantly positively related to both the member's and nonmember's political participation (see Table 8). Holding office in organizations was significantly positively related to the member's political participation only. It is noteworthy that learning in a senior center did not have any significant effect on center members' political participation. Also, being a member in a senior center did not significantly make the senior citizen more active in political participation.

As regards various components of political participation, logistic regression analysis was used to analyze voter turnout in the 1995 Legislative Council election and unconventional participation, which were dichotomous variables. Linear regression analysis was used to analyze conventional participation. As a result, some similarity was obvious. First, mobilization showed significant relationships with all the three components, voting in the latest Legislative Council election in 1995, conventional participation, and unconventional participation (see Table 9). Second, political knowledge had significant relationships with voting and conventional participation, but not with unconventional participation. This linkage suggested that the political knowledge measured was mostly concerned with conventional affairs and figures. Therefore, political knowledge helped promote senior citizen's conventional participation. Third, learning about civic education had significant relationships with both conventional and unconventional participation. Such learning did not have a significant relationship with voting probably because voting tended to be a poor

TABLE 8
Standardized Regression Coefficients for Predicting
Members' and Nonmembers' Political Participation

<i>Explanatory Variable</i>	<i>All</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Nonmembers</i>
Civic-mindedness	.103*	.102*	.099
Self-interest	-.023	-.065	-.026
Political knowledge	.247*	.016	.278*
Mobilization	.181*	.245*	.170*
Enabling			
Participation in organizations	.001	.039	-.013
Holding office in organizations	.002	.150*	-.033
Learning about civic education	.181*	.105*	.200*
Diversity of information sources	.090*	.000	.104
Learning from senior centers	-.069	.054	-.101
Social support	-.030	.046	-.049
Constraint			
Transportation problem	-.082*	-.066	-.081
Disability	.005	-.050	.008
Illness	.062	.045	.063
Financial problem	-.112*	-.010	-.132*
Depression	-.003	-.029	.002
Membership in a senior center	.090	—	—

* $p < .05$.

indicator of political participation (in terms of the difficulty parameter; see Table 2).

Predictors that had a uniquely significant relationship to either one of the components of political participation included civic-mindedness, learning from senior centers, transportation problems, financial problems, and depression (see Table 9). Civic-mindedness was particularly responsible for voting, but its relationships with conventional and unconventional participation were weaker and not significant. The linkage with voting might reflect that senior citizens most likely identify voting as a way to realize their civic duty. On the other hand, they might attribute other causes to conventional and unconventional participation. For instance, they might engage in unconventional participation because they were members of a certain political organization that contended for particular interests rather than public interests at large. Hence, civic-mindedness was not a necessary condition for conventional and unconventional participation.

TABLE 9
Effects on Various Components of Political
Participation for All Senior Citizens

<i>Explanatory Variable</i>	<i>Voting Partial r</i>	<i>Conventional β</i>	<i>Unconventional Partial r</i>
Civic-mindedness	.083*	.049	.048
Self-interest	.000	-.064	.000
Political knowledge	.132*	.141*	.000
Mobilization	.108*	.227*	.152*
Enabling			
Participation in organizations	.000	.060	.000
Holding office in organizations	.000	.019	.000
Learning about civic education	.000	.267*	.187*
Diversity of information sources	.060*	-.147*	.062
Learning from senior centers	-.027	.038	-.104*
Social support	.000	-.075	.000
Constraint			
Transportation problem	.000	-.086*	.066
Disability	.000	-.024	.000
Illness	.000	-.011	.000
Financial problem	-.093*	-.065	.000
Depression	.078*	.002	.000
Membership in a senior center	.000	-.005	.000
<i>R</i> ²	.286	.433	.300

* $p < .05$.

Financial problems and transportation problems seemed to hinder the senior citizen's voting and conventional participation, respectively. Financial problems might be a constraint because voting could particularly impose material and psychological costs to poor senior citizens in that it might be costly for poor senior citizens to dress up and go to the polling station. Similarly, transportation problems were a special hurdle to senior citizens' conventional participation probably because they did not have access to information and opportunity relevant to conventional participation, such as election forums, activities of political organizations, and other politically active people. Quite unexpectedly, depression showed a significantly positive relationship, however weak (.078) with voting. This result was consistent with a previous finding that traumatic events provoked the senior citizen's campaign participation (Peterson and Somit 1994). Probably, depressed senior citizens might find voting a way of relieving their

stress since voting might give them the impression that they are powerful enough to influence the government.

The diversity of information sources was the only variable showing divergent relationships with components of political participation. Whereas it had a significantly positive relationship with voting, it exhibited a significantly negative relationship with conventional participation. It could be that more information obtained from diverse sources facilitates the senior citizen's voting, while reliance on one source of information might indicate the senior citizen's familiarity and involvement in the particular source and thereby promote his or her reliance on the channel (e.g., radio, newspapers) for conventional participation.

PATHS LEADING TO POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

A causal path model contains paths linking up the theoretical variables from enabling, political knowledge, mobilization, civic-mindedness, political participation, and future voting (see Figure 2). Analysis of the causal model revealed that for the senior citizen in general, significant proportions of variance in political participation were attributable to variation in the senior citizen's political knowledge (unique proportion of variance explained = 3.24%), enabling (3.04%), mobilization (2.38%), and civic-mindedness (0.80%). Variation in political participation explained 4.53% of the variance of future voting. Another 1.24% of variance of future voting was attributable to variation in self-interest orientation. Variation in enabling explained significantly 4.49% of variance in political knowledge, 4.44% in mobilization, 3.04% in political participation, and 1.48% in civic-mindedness. Thus, enabling appeared to be the most pervasive predictor of the process of political participation.

Separate analyses of center members and nonmembers show that enabling explained significant portions of variance of or exerted significant effects on a member's political participation, civic-mindedness, mobilization, and political knowledge. Enabling also exerted significant effects on the nonmember's political participation, mobilization, and political knowledge, but not civic-mindedness. Political knowledge in turn exerted significant effects on the nonmember's political participation and civic-mindedness. It, however,

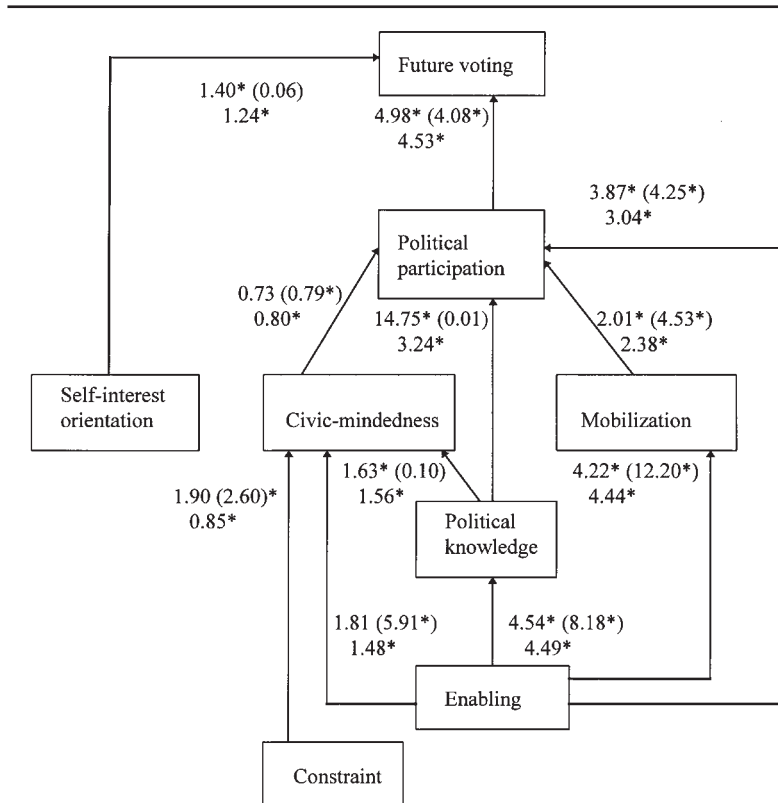


Figure 2: Estimated Causal Model of the Political Participation of Senior Citizens

NOTE: The first two entries are the percentage of explained variance for nonmembers and members, with the latter in parentheses. The third entry refers to the percentage of explained variance derived from analysis of the whole sample. All regression equations controlled for background variables. Only significant paths are shown.

* $p < .05$.

showed no significant effect on the member's political participation and civic-mindedness. Mobilization in turn exerted a significant effect on both the member and nonmember's political participation. Civic-mindedness displayed a weak effect only on the member's political participation. Political participation was the only significant predictor of both the member and nonmember's intention to vote in future elections. In addition, self-orientation exerted a significantly negative

effect on the nonmember's future voting. Constraint only displayed a significantly negative effect on the member's civic-mindedness.

Some variation emerged in the portion of variance explained for members and nonmembers. Enabling explained almost three times the variance of members' mobilization than that of nonmembers' mobilization. Its effect on the members' civic-mindedness was significant, but its effect on that of the nonmembers was nonsignificant. Political knowledge showed significant effects only on the nonmember's political participation and civic-mindedness. The portion of variance in nonmembers' political participation explained by political knowledge was much higher than that of members' political participation.

In all, enabling appeared to be a pervasive determinant of the senior citizen's political knowledge, behavior, and attitudes. Political knowledge seemed to be a strong determinant of the nonmember's political participation. Political participation appeared to be the sole theoretical predictor of the senior citizen's intention to vote in future elections because it acted as a filter for the effects of other theoretical variables on future voting. The causal model, therefore, takes a bottle or funnel shape, with political participation serving as the bottleneck. Whereas political participation might have its causal root in political knowledge, mobilization, and enabling, it did not seem to depend in any large way on rationality factors, including civic-mindedness and self-interest orientation.

Discussion

The findings in this research show that apart from voting, other forms of political participation of senior citizens are generally low in Hong Kong. This indicates a general readiness of Chinese senior citizens to participate in a less demanding form of political participation, such as voting, which is an irregular activity, rather than in more demanding forms of political activity such as involvement in election campaigns and daily political activities. Accessibility, disability, health, and financial problems are not apparent in constraining senior citizens' political participation in Hong Kong. This may be due to the fact that Hong Kong is a small city with good transportation facilities.

The strong effect of the mobilization and enabling factors may also provide some of the explanation. Senior citizens are enabled to participate politically but at the same time they are also a target for mobilization by political parties and politicians.

Political knowledge appeared to be the strongest predictor, apart from background factors, of the senior citizen's political participation, especially among nonmembers of senior centers, accounting for 14.75% of variance. This finding illustrates the importance of the senior citizen's internal forces for political participation. Moreover, it may endorse an alternative influence of civic-mindedness, in terms of civic-awareness. The external force, mobilization by political organizations, was also important, particularly among members of senior centers. A third significant force was enabling and learning. All these three significant forces of knowledge, mobilization, and enabling point to the significance of power as a determinant of action. The causal force of power is beyond the scope of rationality, consistency, and conformity to norms. Under the influence of power, one acts not because one thinks that the action is good, or the act is consistent with some past act, or because it is socially desirable, but because one is influenced and pressured to do so.

The strong effect of the mobilization factor on political participation raises a concern that senior citizens are vulnerable to influence or manipulation by politicians. This may be the case particularly with center members who are more open to mobilization pressures than nonmember seniors—they are easier to contact, urge, or persuade by politicians than are nonmembers. There may, however, be another reason for this: members of senior centers are a more active group in participating in community activities, and they have more opportunities to contact politicians than do seniors in their households. This can explain why enabling becomes the prominent influential factor, secondary to the political knowledge factor, for the nonmember group. It implies that nonmembers participate politically, not because they are strongly mobilized but because they are more influenced by political knowledge, learning from civic education, organizations, and different sources of information.

As shown earlier, enabling played a pivotal role in facilitating political participation and enhancing political knowledge and civic-mindedness. Hence, organizational participation and learning tended

to empower senior citizens. This finding should be encouraging to those gerontological social workers who advocate strengthening senior citizens' knowledge, civic-mindedness, and political participation as an informed practice. It could also be justifiably argued that since senior citizens' political participation does not seem to stem from self-interest, social workers' advocacy designed to enhance senior citizens' political participation is justifiable and commendable.

The inferior reliability of self-interest orientation is notable. It may be due to the insignificant relationship between the orientation and political participation and its components or it may be due to the real fact that self-interested orientation was irrelevant to senior citizens in Hong Kong. To the extent that the latter is the case, those rational (e.g., spatial, directional, retrospective, prospective, and other) models based on the self-interest orientation may not be useful in predicting Chinese senior citizens' political behavior. Caution in interpreting these results is, however, needed because the low reliability of self-reported measures is such a common shortcoming of research on senior citizens (Peterson and Somit 1994).

It is commonly hypothesized that members of senior centers have more opportunity to learn about civic education, and, as a result, their sense of civic-mindedness is higher than that of nonmembers. This hypothesis is not supported by this research. Our findings show that for the center member group, civic-mindedness has only a weak impact on political participation and that learning from centers does not make a significant contribution. This result should be of interest to gerontological social workers, for it suggests that they need to assess both the adequacy and the quality of civic education in senior centers. Another question concerns the effectiveness of senior centers in facilitating and strengthening members' participation in other forms of political participation.

A strong mobilization effect among members has implications for gerontological practice. Gerontological social workers need to be aware that in an increasingly political environment, services for senior citizens are in no way segregated from political activities. Senior centers cannot avoid intervention by politicians. Promoting senior citizens' political consciousness, helping them learn how to relate to politicians, and developing their awareness to counteract manipulation by

political parties need to become a focal concern of gerontological practice.

Conclusion

Studies of political participation of the general population have paid little attention to the political behavior of senior citizens. This research, it is hoped, fills some of the conceptual and empirical voids in the uncharted political life of senior citizens. Senior citizens exercise less influence on political events than one would expect from demographic data. Our research shows that senior citizens' turnout at elections compares favorably with that of the general population in Hong Kong. There is, however, a question mark concerning the nature of the driving forces behind this degree of political participation by the elderly. It seems that the influence and manipulation of politicians and political parties have as much to do with it as the rational decision by the elderly themselves. Political mobilization plays too high a part in the voting decisions of the elderly.

This research assessed the significance of five factors to the political participation of the elderly: rationality, political knowledge, mobilization, enabling, and constraint. Political knowledge, mobilization, and enabling were identified as the most influential factors. Mobilization has a strong effect on the political behavior of senior citizens who are members of senior centers, whereas nonmembers' participation is driven by learning from civic education and different sources of information. In a rapidly changing political environment, issues concerning the rationality of senior citizens' political behavior and the impact of mobilization are worthy of more attention by researchers and others concerned with the welfare of the elderly.

The results of this research also suggest that gerontological social workers need to make more efforts to counteract the negative effect of political mobilization by promoting enabling activities and enhancing civic education for senior citizens, particularly those in senior centers.

APPENDIX
Reliabilities and Corrected Item-Total
Correlations for Items of Composite Scales

<i>Scale</i>	<i>Item-Total Correlation r</i>
Civic-Mindedness Scale	
Every citizen should be concerned with public affairs	.287
The electorate should vote in every election	.464
Voting is a way to express opinion about public affairs; it is worth doing	.624
No matter what a person's political beliefs are, he or she is entitled to the same legal rights as anyone else	.403
It is necessary that all, regardless of their views, be allowed to express themselves freely	.465
Economic development is more important than democracy in Hong Kong	.138
Political activity should maintain prosperity and security in Hong Kong	.377
Voting for a representative helps improve the community	.472
Seeing things that hurt the community interest, one should oppose them	.592
We should vote only for the candidate who is competent to solve problems about citizens' livelihood	.437
Self-Interest Scale	
The goal of voting is to protect one's interest	.161
It is far more realistic to hope for personal fulfillment than to hope that you can contribute to improving social conditions	.176
You oppose the government only when it hurts your living	.214
You support only the policy that benefits you personally	.162
You wish to vote for a representative who helps you	.204
You will vote for the candidate who agrees with your political view	.099
Political Mobilization Scale	
Urged by candidates	.565
Urged by assistants of candidates	.505
Urged by social workers or staff of the Center	.208
Urged by family members	.307
Urged by neighbors or friends	.377
Urged by government officials	.215
Urged by other organizations	.225
Encouraged to demonstrate by a party	.198
Encouraged to attend activities by social workers or organizations	.205
Urged or brought by car by candidates to vote	.388
Constraint Scale	
a. Disability	
You have difficulty going shopping	.612
You have difficulty going upstairs and downstairs	.612
b. Illness	
Your health is not good	.702
You have chronic illnesses	.686
You have no physical problems	.500
You see a doctor regularly	.722

APPENDIX Continued

Scale	Item-Total Correlation r
Constraint Scale	
c. Financial problem	
You have financial problems	.431
Your income is insufficient	.536
You do not manage to save money each month	.360
d. Depressive affect	
You felt depressed	.720
You felt lonely	.720
You felt sad	.722
You felt fearful	.563
Your life was not a success	.133
Enabling Scale	
a. Learning from civic education	
Learned about election affairs	.317
Learned about parties	.461
Learned about the political system	.323
Learned about community affairs or societal problems	.461
Learned about problems, rights, policy about the elderly	.452
b. Diverse sources for information seeking	
Learned by watching television	.489
Learned by listening to radio	.444
Learned by reading printed media	.478
Learned from the family or friends	.314
c. Received social support	
Someone helped you do housework	.397
Someone consoled you	.530
Someone gave you advice	.548
Someone helped you handle some emergency	.153

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