The Profile of Board Membership in Israeli Voluntary Organizations

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This study of 161 nonprofit organizations in Israel was aimed at exploring the composition of boards, the methods employed to recruit new board members, and the selection criteria of board members. The results suggest that boards tend to be closed, elitist circles. Most organizations use mainly informal means to recruit new board members. The most important selection criteria were those related to interpersonal relationships, willingness to contribute time, and expressing an interest in working for the organization.

KEY WORDS: nonprofit boards; voluntary organizations; board membership; Israel.

INTRODUCTION

Civil society is essentially democratic and composed of people who enjoy rights of full social citizenship. The right of participation in the market place or in public and voluntary organizations is a fundamental right of citizenship in terms of influence on decision-making and control. Thus, active citizenship forms the cornerstone of civil society and leads to citizen empowerment (Etzioni, 1994). Furthermore, pluralism is the core of a civic society and implies diversity in terms of ideas, institutions, and interests (Powell, 2001). What causes a society to have institutions with different levels of democracy? Putnam (1993) argues that the performance of democratic institutions depends on their social, economic, and cultural milieu, and that the quality of a democracy depends on its citizens. He looks for the conditions that enable the establishment of effective representative institutions that are responsive to their constituents. He asserts that institutions are

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shaped by the history of civic engagement that prior events condition what comes after, and by their social context in terms of the character of civic life. Putnam found that this association is applicable across countries (Putnam, 1995a,b); that the governance of an institution depends on its social capital and civic community with some being more civic-minded than others.

One way to find out how societies achieve citizen participation and exercise influence and control is through the examination of the composition of board memberships of voluntary organizations (Langton, 1978; Janoski, 1998). Two major theoretical perspectives on board governance might cast light on board composition and how board members are selected. The first is stewardship theory (Donaldson and Davis, 1991; Muth and Donaldson, 1998), which asserts that the main function of the board is to improve organizational performance and decision-making by selecting board members based on their expertise, experience, and contacts that may help the organization achieve its goals (Cornforth, 2003). The second is the democratic model, which maintains that the major role of governing boards is to represent the interests of various constituencies and groups. Ideally, people from any social class, ethnic origin, or cultural background should have equal opportunities to voice their attitudes and ideas, and to influence the decisions made in organizations that may affect their lives. This may also enhance a sense of accountability, ensure more openness among the board members, and give more legitimacy to the organization (Robinson and Shaw, 2003). These different perspectives imply different methods of board member selection and different profiles of board composition. Whereas according to the first perspective candidates for board membership are either selected or appointed, the second perspective emphasizes democratic elections—although some board members can be appointed to ensure the representation of specific groups that otherwise may not be elected as board members (Cornforth, 2003).

Since only a limited number of persons can become board members of nonprofit organizations, this poses a substantial dilemma: should board members be chosen based on their professional qualifications, thus encouraging an elitist and undemocratic nature, or should they be elected because they represent different ideas and interests? In order to gain a broader understanding on this issue, this paper adopts—in the Israeli context—a multi-paradigmatic approach that includes both perspectives.

The purpose of this study is threefold: (1) to examine who are the board members of Israeli voluntary organizations and what characteristics qualified them to become board members—specifically, to determine to what extent the characteristics of board members reflect expertise and experience and to what extent they represent different constituencies representing different interests and ideas on the other hand; (2) to explore the extent to which people belonging to different constituencies have equal chances to become board members, and what means of recruitment and selection criteria have been adopted that might either

increase or decrease the chances of someone being chosen as a board member; and (3) to more broadly determine if boards acting in different societal and cultural contexts are different in terms of their board composition and recruitment methods.

RESEARCHING BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Previous studies show that various socioeconomic and sociodemographic characteristics are related to how individuals are chosen to become board members. Composition relates to characteristics such as age, gender, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, professional background, and expertise (Middleton, 1987).

Taking into account the democratic perspective, studies found that board members that are representative of the public and the various constituencies served by the organization are important for several reasons. First, a board that is heterogeneous in terms of its members' characteristics, and which represents also various constituencies with different interests and identities, has a significant impact on the legitimacy it is granted by its environment in terms of its worthiness in the eyes of important constituencies, including those receiving its services and its community of volunteers (Trecker, 1970; Abzug and Galaskiewicz, 2001). Second, legitimacy is an important factor when resource dependency plays a role in the exchange between nonprofit organizations and both the public sector and private funders (Saidel and Harlan, 1998). Third, the composition of a board is also related to its responsibilities, activities, and outcomes. For example, Miller *et al*. (1988) found that the number of board members representing clients was related to greater board involvement in program oversight, fundraising, and political influence, and that any marketing background of board members was positively correlated with fund raising, image development, and financial and legal advises. They concluded that the composition of board members affected the board's contribution to the organization's achievements. Gibelman *et al*. (1997) believe that a heterogeneous board in terms of background, skills, and experience may better advance the organization. Fourth, diversity in board composition may enhance the collective wisdom of the organization and thus result in better policies that will be responsive to the needs of its constituencies, more accountability to the stakeholders (the public), more transparency, and more commitment to the organization (Greer *et al*., 2003; Locke *et al*., 2003; Robinson and Shaw, 2003).

Earlier studies that were conducted in Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States addressed the issue of board composition in nonprofit organizations and examined the extent to which various groups in terms of gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic class, as well as the clients served by these organizations are represented. Most studies show, however, that boards lack diversity and that specific population groups are extensively underrepresented on boards of nonprofit

organizations, whilst the most represented are those of the upper classes and narrow social elites who control economic, social, and political resources. The majority are white, middle-aged, men who have attained a higher education, and have professional backgrounds—such as management and business administration. Those under 30 and over 60 and users of the organizations' services are the least represented (Knoke, 1990; Murray *et al*., 1992; Daley *et al*., 1996; Green and Griesinger, 1996; Shaiko, 1996; 1997; Bubis and Cohen, 1998; Abzug and Galaskiewicz, 2001; Robinson and Shaw, 2003). Only a few studies found that the board members were representative of their constituencies (Austin and Woolver, 1992; Hevesi and Millstein, 2001).

Recruitment Methods for New Board Members

The task of recruitment is to assemble a board that includes members with suitable qualifications that may help the organization achieve its goals (Greer *et al*., 2003). Several methods of board member recruitment are generally used: (1) elections—all organization members (general assembly) vote for the proposed nominees; (2) selections—only the board is authorized to nominate new board members; (3) appointments—new members are appointed by stakeholders or other external organizations or political agencies. Organizations may differ in the way they choose to recruit their board members (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998). While elections are more formal and tend to be more democratic, selection by the board itself is a much more informal process; usually the people who are proposed are known through their relationships with board members, which may strengthen the elitist character of the board.

Green and Griesinger (1996) include board selection as one of the primary responsibilities of the board. Gibelman *et al*. (1997) argue that active recruitment of board members is essential for reinvigorating organizations with ideas, perspectives, and dynamics, and for bringing about innovations and organizational growth. In a survey conducted among nonprofit organizations in New York City, in the vast majority of the organizations the role of the boards was to nominate its own board members (Hevesi and Millstein, 2001). Smith (1992) found that semiformal volunteer organizations tended to be more open to recruiting new members and were therefore different from formal organizations. These kinds of organizations tended to be younger and smaller compared to the others. In England, for example, there are many nongovernmental organizations that are governed by board members who are appointed by the government or other institutions, or selected by existing board members (Robinson and Shaw, 2003). Furthermore, many of these organizations rely heavily on social networks of board members when recruiting new board members to their boards, which means that these boards tend to be self-perpetuating cliques and least democratic and representative of the public.

Selection Criteria

Preferred traits of new board members may differ among organizations. Three major categories of selection criteria can be identified. First, personal resources that include achieved status—education, professional skills that are essential to the board's activity, and experience, such as in financial management, accountancy, the law, and other specific areas of expertise relevant to the organization's domain of activity (Abzug and Galaskiewicz, 2001; Lin, 2001). Second, personal characteristics that include ascribed status—age, gender, ethnicity, religion, and race—and representatives of various constituencies within the community and society representing different perspectives, identities, and interests, including clients of the organization's services. Third, people who possess social capital in terms of the right social connections with the kinds of resources necessary and useful for the organization (Lin, 2001). This is of particular importance because nonprofits operate in an environment where social skills and networks are crucial to negotiate with the surroundings.

Bradshaw *et al*. (1992) found that the most important selection criteria for board members were those associated with being an enthusiastic and committed supporter of the organization and having special skills or knowledge relevant to it, whereas the least important criteria were being users of the organization's services, belonging to a specific ethnic or religious background, and being prepared to donate funds to the organization.

RESEARCHING BOARD MEMBERSHIP IN ISRAEL

To date, there are approximately 31,000 registered nonprofit organizations in Israel, although only a third of them are presently active. Many of the voluntary organizations in Israel were founded before the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948, and many of these became the foundations of the public administration and governmental institutions that were established thereafter.

The Associations' Law in Israel, which was enacted in 1980, defines several major rules with respect to organization membership and board selection. First, every person 18 years of age and over is eligible to become a member of a voluntary organization. This membership is personal and non-transferable. Second, the general assembly of each organization is the authorized organ to select board members unless its bylaws determine otherwise; for example, the bylaws can determine that a person or an external body can appoint all or part of the board members.

Israeli law does not specify the method of selection, but this is regularly defined in an organization's bylaws, which means that every organization has the discretion to determine its specific methods of selection. In reality, the board in many organizations prepares a list of proposed new board members, either as a

bloc or as a selected range of nominees, and the general assembly then votes on the proposed list. It is the board's responsibility to act on behalf of the organization and achieve its goals. Israeli law thus affords every organization considerable freedom and discretion in board member selection and does not deal with the issue of board composition.

Two questions arise in this context. First, are recruitment methods and selection criteria universal, and do these methods and criteria resemble those found in other countries? Second, do voluntary organizations differ in terms of the recruitment means and selection criteria they employ? It is assumed that, as in other countries, board composition of voluntary organizations in Israel may exhibit elitist characteristics such as social class, gender, ethnicity, and so on.

Research Method

The data for this study are drawn from a study that was conducted by the Israeli Center for Third Sector Research at the Ben-Gurion University of the Negev in Israel and included 161 nonprofit organizations in Israel and was carried out between May and December 2000 (Iecovich *et al*., 2002). Data collection included face-to-face interviews with executive directors and chairpersons of organizations who were members of five national umbrella organizations; that is, organizations whose main goals are to promote groups of voluntary organizations that have common interests in such matters as taxes, legislation, fund raising, and the establishment of mutually agreed standards of operation, quality of management, and ethics. Membership in such a cooperative umbrella organization is voluntary, and its governing body is composed of the chairpersons or directors of each member organization. Five umbrella organization categories that were selected for this study represent the mainstream of voluntary organizations in Israel: (1) culture and recreation; (2) education and research; (3) health; (4) social services; and (5) advocacy.

Altogether, the list included 282 organizations of which 161 organizations agreed to be interviewed. To examine if there was a systemic bias a comparison between those organizations interviewed and those that were not included in the sample was conducted. The comparison included variables such as annual budget, geographic locations, domains of activity, and age of organizations. The findings indicated that both groups of organizations were similar on these parameters. Respondents were executive directors, or, when an organization did not employ an executive director, the chairperson. Thus, 121 executive directors and 35 chairpersons were interviewed, as well as 5 board members (either vice-chairpersons or treasurers) in those cases where the chairperson was unavailable. A questionnaire based on the instrument developed by Murray *et al*. (1992) was constructed in Hebrew. A pretest was conducted and questions were revised on the basis of the feedback.

Based on Murray *et al*. (1992), the measures used to test board composition included the following questions:

- *Gender*. How many men and women are there on the board?
- *Age*. What is the approximate age distribution of board members: under 30, between 31 and 40, between 41 and 50, between 51 and 60, over 60?
- *Ethnic group*. To the best of your knowledge, how many board members belong to the following ethnic origin: Sephardim (originated in Asia-Africa), Ashkenazim (born in Europe-America), Sabras (born in Israel)?
- *Nationality*. To best of your knowledge, how many board members are Jews? How many are Arabs?
- *Education*. To the best of your knowledge, how many board members have the following educational background: high school graduate or less, university graduate, additional professional qualifications (e.g., M.A., Ph.D.)?
- *Employment status*. To the best of your knowledge, how many board members work: full-time, part-time, not in paid employment?
- *Occupational background*. To the best of your knowledge, how many board members come from: managerial or professional background, skilled occupations?
- *Experience on present board*. What is the approximate number of board members who have been on your board: less than 2 years, more than 2 years?

The measure used to test recruitment methods included one question in which respondents were presented with an inventory of eight different methods of board recruitment, including: board nominates its own candidates for membership; and, new board members are recruited by drawing on the personal contacts of existing board members (see Table III). Respondents could choose more than one answer from the list, each scored between 1 (=To a very great extent) and 3 (=Rarely or never).

With respect to selection criteria, based on the measure of Murray *et al*. (1992), respondents were presented with an inventory composed of 11 criteria as shown in Table IV. They could choose more than one answer, with scores for each criterion ranging from 1 (=One of the most important criteria) to 5 (=Rarely or never considered).

Research Findings

Sample Characteristics

Included in the sample of organizations were (by categories): 34 (21.1%) culture and recreation; 29 (18.0%) education and research; 43 (26.7%) social service; 18 (11.2%) health; and, 37 (23.0%) advocacy. The median age of the

organizations was 19 years. Organizational size was defined according to four measures: size of membership; number of volunteers; number of paid workers; and, annual budget. Membership ranged from 5 to 32,000 members, with the median being 130 members. Number of volunteers ranged from 5 to 6,030 with the median being 40 volunteers, and the number of paid workers ranged from no paid workers to 4,100 employees, with the median being 20 paid workers. Annual budget ranged from approximately $500 to $137,500,000 a year, with the median being approximately $530,000. Board size ranged from 2 to 70 members with a median of 12 and was significantly correlated with organization age ($r = .20$, $p < .05$), and public grants ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$). Board size was also found significantly associated with type of organization—with culture and recreation and healthcare organizations having larger boards than education and research and social service organizations ($\chi^2 = 11.04$, $p < .05$, df $= 4$).

Characteristics of Board Chairpersons

Table I presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the chairpersons and the duration of tenure on board. The findings show that the majority of chairpersons (55.8%) are 45–64 years old with a mean age of 57.31 (while the majority (56%) of the general population in Israel is under the age of 44). The vast majority of

Table I. Sociodemographic Characteristics of Board Chairpersons Compared to the General Adult Population

| | Chairpersons | | | | General adult population[*] |
Variable	N	%	M	SD	(N = 3,9447,000) (%)
Age group	95	100.0	57.31	12.45	100.0
<29	3	3.2			26.2
30–44	10	10.5			29.8
45–64	53	55.8			28.4
>65	29	30.5			15.6
Gender	96	100.0			100.0
Men	72	73.5			48.1
Women	26	26.7			51.9
Ethnic origin	96	100.0			100.0
Asia–Africa	20	20.8			29.3
Europe-America	26	27.1			34.9
Israel	50	52.1			35.8
Education	97	100.0			100.0
Elementary school	0	0			18.8
High school	7	7.2			38.8
University	90	92.8			35.4

[*]Including only those over the age of 20 except for education, which includes those aged 25 years and over. Data on the general adult population was drawn from the database of the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in Israel. Data are updated to the year 2000.

chairpersons (73.5%) are men compared to 48.1% among the general population and the vast majority of chairpersons hold academic degrees (92.8%) compared to 35.4% of the general population. In terms of ethnicity, more than half (52.1%) of the chairpersons were born in Israel compared to 35.8% of the general population. Those born in Asian-African countries, which comprise 29.3% of the Jewish general population, comprised the smallest proportion of chairpersons (20.8%). Those born in American-European countries that comprise 34.9% of the Jewish general population, made up of 27.1% of the chairpersons.

Board Member Composition

Table II presents the proportions of board members by their sociodemographic characteristics and professional background. The findings show that, in

Table II. Proportions of Board Members by Sociodemographic Characteristics

Variable	Proportion of board members in each category			
	0–25%	26–50%	>50%	Median
Gender				
Men ($N = 125$)	8.0	20.8	71.2	66.7
Women ($N = 124$)	38.7	40.3	21.0	32.3
Age group				
<30 ($N = 113$)	93.8	4.4	1.8	00.0
31–40 ($N = 116$)	85.3	11.3	3.4	00.0
41–50 ($N = 119$)	50.4	32.0	17.6	25.0
51–60 ($N = 121$)	57.9	25.6	16.5	20.0
>61 ($N = 119$)	55.7	20.8	23.5	13.3
Ethnic origin				
Asia–Africa ($N = 102$)	100.0	0	0	00.0
Europe-America ($N = 99$)	28.6	28.6	42.8	50.0
Israel ($N = 110$)	44.6	29.1	26.3	29.9
Nationality				
Jews	5.9	1.5	92.6	100.0
Arabs	93.1	2.3	4.6	00.0
Educational background				
High school or less	68.6	15.7	15.7	00.0
University or college	37.1	29.8	33.1	38.2
Professional or postgraduate	46.4	24.0	29.6	29.0
Employment status				
Employed full-time	26.0	9.0	65.0	77.0
Employed part-time	93.7	5.2	1.1	00.0
Not in paid employment	62.9	13.4	23.7	13.3
Occupational background				
Managerial or professional	9.3	20.6	70.1	75.0
Skilled occupations	80.4	17.6	2.0	14.1
Experience on present board				
Less than 2 years	74.8	17.6	7.6	00.0
More than 2 years	6.5	5.7	87.8	90.1

93.8% of the organizations, those under the age of 30 were either not represented at all on their boards or constituted a small minority of the board members. A similar picture was obtained with respect to those aged 31–40. The most represented age groups were those aged 41–60 and the most underrepresented age group was that of under 30.

The younger the organization, the greater the proportion of board members under the age of 30 ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$); the older the organization, the greater proportion of board members aged 61 and over ($r = .25$, $p < .01$). In addition, the larger the annual budget of the organization the fewer board members under the age of 30 ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$). A funding base in which donations constitute a greater proportion of an organization's revenues, was found to be negatively correlated with a greater proportion of board members over the age 60 ($r = -.24$, $p < .05$) and positively correlated with a greater proportion of board members under the age of 30 ($r = .34$, $p < .01$). No significant differences were found among the five categories of organizations except for two age groups: in advocacy organizations, the mean proportion of those aged under 30 was higher than those of other age groups ($F = 3.73$, $p < .01$), and in culture and recreation organizations, the mean proportion of those aged 41–50 was higher than those of other age groups ($F = 3.59$, $p < .01$).

Gender

The findings show that women were underrepresented on boards. In 38.7% of the organizations, women constituted 0–25% of board members, as compared to 8% of the organizations where men constituted 0–25% of the board members. Women were the majority (51% and over) on boards in only 21% of the organizations, as compared to 71.2% of the organizations where men were in the majority. No significant differences were found between the five categories of organizations with regard to proportions of men and women on boards. The findings show that the greater the annual budget of the organization, the greater the proportion of men ($r = .22$, $p < .05$) and the smaller proportion of women on boards ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$). The more the organization is dependent on governmental revenues, the more likely it is to have a smaller proportion of women board members ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$). Finally, the more organizations are dependent on membership fees, the greater the percentage of women on the board ($r = .22$, $p < .05$).

Ethnic Origin

In all the organizations studied, board members born in Asian-African countries made up a minority of board memberships as compared to board members that were born in America-Europe (28.6%) and Israel (44.6%). Thus, those born in Asian-African countries were significantly underrepresented on boards. The more the organization relied on public grants and funding, the more of its board

members were native Israelis. No other significant associations were found between other organizational variables and the proportions of board members from different ethnic origins.

Nationality

The vast majority (82.3%) of organizations had no non-Jewish board members, whereas in the vast majority of the organizations (92.6%), Jewish members made up the majority of board members. It should be noted that non-Jews constitute approximately 19% of Israel's adult general population. No significant correlations were found between organizational characteristics and nationality.

Education

The findings show that in most organizations (68.6%) members with primary education constituted 0–25% of the board members. In only 15.7% of the organizations were they in the majority, as compared to 33.1% and 29.6% who had attained secondary and higher education, respectively. The findings also show that the larger the organization's budget, the more members with higher professional qualifications there were (e.g., M.A. and Ph.D.) ($r = .26$, $p < .01$).

Employment Status

The majority of board members in approximately two-thirds of the organizations included members who were employed full-time, whereas in most organizations, those who are part-time or unemployed make up a minority of board members. The more an organization relied on public funding, the more board members were employed part-time ($r = .41$, $p < .001$), and the more an organization derived its revenues from service sales the fewer board members who were employed part-time ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$). Significant differences were found between types of organizations and the employment status of board members; in culture and recreation and in social service organizations there were more board members who were employed full-time compared to the other organizations ($F = 3.21$, $p < .05$), and in education and research as well as in advocacy organizations there were more board members who were unemployed ($F = 3.26$, $p < .05$).

Occupational Background

In most organizations (70%), the boards had a majority of members with managerial or professional backgrounds, whereas in the majority of organizations, a minority of the board members had skilled occupations. The findings also show that the larger the organization's budget, the greater the proportion of board members with managerial or professional backgrounds ($r = .23$, $p < .05$); and

the more the organization relied on service sales, the greater the proportion of board members with managerial or professional backgrounds ($r = .25$, $p < .05$).

Experience on Present Board

In most organizations (74.8%), new board members constituted 0–25% of the board members, as compared to 6.5% of the organizations that had board members with more than 2 years experience. The older the organization and the more the organization relied on donations, the fewer new board members there were ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$ and $r = -.20$, $p < .05$ respectively). No significant relationship was found, however, between an organization's budget and the proportion of senior board members.

Recruitment Procedures for New Board Members

Respondents were asked to rate the frequency of using various methods of recruitment of new board members. The findings presented in Table III show that the most widely implemented methods were "board members propose their colleagues," "the board selects nominees who are recommended by various persons inside and outside the organization," and, appointment by governmental agencies (33.8%, 40.0%, and 33.8%, respectively). The findings indicate significant negative correlations between frequency of publication in the media and organization age ($r = -.19$, $p < .05$), membership ($r = -.25$, $p < .01$), budget ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$), and number of paid workers ($r = -35$, $p < .001$), suggesting that the older the organization, the greater its membership and budget; and, also, the greater the number of paid workers, the more the organization tended to recruit board members through the media. The findings also show that the greater the organization's number of volunteers and paid workers, the more recruitment was performed via appointment by governmental agencies ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$ and $r = -.19$, $p < .05$, respectively). All other methods of recruitment were insignificantly correlated with organizational traits.

Table III. Frequencies of Use of Different Recruitment Methods ($N = 160$)

Variable	Very often	Sometimes	Very rare	Total
(1) A nominating committee recommends	13.1	7.5	79.4	100
(2) Board members suggest their comrades	33.8	20.6	45.6	100
(3) The board selects nominees	40.0	18.8	41.3	100
(4) The general assembly proposes	7.5	6.9	85.6	100
(5) The CEO recommends to the board	7.5	8.8	83.8	100
(6) Externally appointed	33.8	14.4	51.9	100
(7) Publication in the media	25.6	18.1	56.3	100

Table IV. Selection Criteria of Board Members (%)

Variable	Important	Unimportant	Total
(1) Possess specific needed skills or knowledge; e.g., accounting, marketing, law ($N = 151$)	69.5	30.5	100
(2) Have good connections with particular elements of the community whose representation we want to have in our organization ($N = 149$)	82.6	17.4	100
(3) Bring prestige to our organization in the eyes of community leaders ($N = 146$)	76.0	24.0	100
(4) Have a proven track record in terms of willingness to contribute the time and effort we need ($N = 148$)	90.5	9.5	100
(5) Have a reputation for being able to work well with others ($N = 147$)	81.0	19.0	100
(6) Be willing and able to raise funds ($N = 147$)	76.9	23.1	100
(7) Show an interest in the work of the organization ($N = 149$)	96.6	3.4	100
(8) Be willing to donate funds ($N = 148$)	27.7	72.3	100
(9) Be of a specific ethnic or religious background ($N = 147$)	15.0	85.0	100
(10) Be a user of the organization's services ($N = 147$)	29.3	70.7	100
(11) Share an ideology about the organization with existing board members ($N = 145$)	66.9	33.1	100

Selection Criteria

Respondents were asked to rate the importance of each criterion for new board member selection. The findings presented in Table IV show that the most important selection criteria were as follows: "Show an interest in the work of the organization," "Have a proven track record in terms of willingness to contribute time and effort needed for the organization," "Have good connections with particular elements of the community which the organization wants to have represented in their organization," and "Have a reputation for being able to work well with others" (96.6%, 90.5%, 82.6%, and 81%, respectively). The least important selection criteria were: "Being of a specific ethnic or religious background," "Being willing to donate funds," and "Being a user of the organization's services" (15%, 27.7%, and 29.3%, respectively).

No significant differences were found between organizational characteristics and selection criteria except with regard to organization's membership and sources of revenues. The larger the organization membership, the more "sharing an ideology about the organization with existing board members" was an important criterion for new member selection ($r = -.21$, $p < .05$). In addition, the more an organization was dependent on governmental revenues, the less the board members had to show an interest in the work of the organization ($r = .28$, $p < .01$); and the more an organization was dependent on donations, the more the board members had to be willing and able to raise funds ($r = -.23$, $p < .05$), and

the less they had to share an ideology about the organization with existing board members ($r = .23$, $p < .0.5$). Finally, the more an organization was dependent on membership fees, the less "board members had to bring prestige to the organization in the eyes of community leaders" was an important criterion for new member selection ($r = .21$, $p < .05$).

Organization missions' were significantly correlated with specific selection criteria. For example, service organizations were found to be significantly correlated with the possession of specific skills and knowledge ($r = .22$, $p < .05$); mutual benefit organizations were found to be significantly correlated with a board candidate being a user of the organization's services ($r = .25$, $p < .01$); advocacy organizations were found to be significantly correlated with the board member being a user of the organization's services ($r = .25$, $p < .01$) and sharing an ideology about the organization with existing board members ($r = .32$, $p < .001$); membership organizations emphasized sharing an ideology about the organization with the existing board members ($r = .21$, $p < .05$) and being willing to donate funds ($r = .18$, $p < .05$); trade union organizations were correlated with possession of specific skills and knowledge ($r = .22$, $p < .05$); and research and development organizations were significantly correlated with possession of specific skills and knowledge ($r = .20$, $p < .05$) and being willing and able to raise funds ($r = .21$, $p < .05$).

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study show that board members' composition is characterized by specific traits in terms of their ascribed status; e.g., ethnicity and nationality, age and gender, and in terms of their achieved status (i.e., high education and professional background). In other words, although board characteristics include a mixture of ascribed and achieved statuses, they indicate that some groups are over-represented on boards, whereas others are underrepresented. This suggests that organizations tend to act according to the stewardship model, which emphasizes achieved qualifications, whereas the democratic model receives less attention in board composition. Consequently, specific groups in the public do not have equal opportunities to voice their interests, attitudes, and ideas.

These findings are consistent with those of previous studies in North American countries and in the United Kingdom (Green and Griesinger, 1996; Abzug and Galaskiewicz, 2001; Robinson and Shaw, 2003), which suggest that from a cross-cultural point of view, these tendencies appear to be similar and universal in different countries and cultures. Comparison between Israel and Canada (Murray *et al*., 1992), for example, shows that despite the similarities, there can be significant differences in board composition. In Canada, for example, voluntary work among younger people is more common than in Israel, whereas in Israel it is more

common that those unemployed—in particular those who are pensioners—take an active part in voluntary work.

The question is what accounts for these differences? It has been suggested that different contextual and contingent elements (including different environments), institutional norms (including statutory requirements), as well as different histories in terms of the evolvement of civic society may account for differences (Putnam, 1993; Ostrover and Stone, 2001; Miller-Millesen, 2003). For example, whereas Israeli nonprofit organizations have a heavy dependence on government funding (forming the primary financial footing on which these organizations exist), in Canada nonprofit organization rely more on donations. These differences are well reflected in the differences found with regard to board composition and suggest that the type of resource dependence of a voluntary organization on its environment is associated with board characteristics. Beyond the similarities between boards of voluntary organizations in different countries, there are significant differences, which merit further research in order to gain a better understanding of this phenomenon.

A key question is what are the reasons for certain groups being underrepresented on boards? Two major groups of factors are likely to explain these findings—first, factors depending on potential candidates, and second, those dependent on the organization. These are discussed in turn.

There are several reasons why specific groups of people refrain from being involved in such activities. One is that they are unable to be engaged in voluntary work; for example, the curvilinear pattern of board membership with regard to age is consistent with findings found in other studies that have examined age patterns of memberships in voluntary associations in general (Cutler and Hendricks, 2000), and board memberships in particular (Murray *et al.*, 1992). This curvilinear pattern suggests that younger and older adults are least involved in voluntary activity. For the former, mundane issues that act as deterrents include jobs, careers, and economic status, coupled with lack of professional experience. For the older adults, health problems, coupled with lower levels of education inhibit interest in voluntary activities (Rotolo, 1999).

Another set of reasons relate to those of middle- and upper-classes who have attained higher education and professional qualifications (achieved status) and tend to become board members because they are people who are successful and economically secure and have the time and inclination to devote themselves to their communities. Awareness of the importance of civic participation and public-mindedness, actualized through board membership, may result when people are at a stage of life at which such participation is realistic—essentially, the mundane issues of life have been settled. Representatives of groups such as service users, the lower classes, and members of specific ethnic groups, are therefore less inclined to volunteer and become board members.

Beyond this, potential board members may also be frightened off by the complexities of board responsibilities—such as fiduciary duties and the personal

responsibilities imposed on board members by law—to put forth their best efforts to warrant the organization's success. Lack of appropriate qualifications in terms of education, professional background, and experience, or the lack of free time to become involved in such activities may also serve as deterrents (Harris, 1998; Harris and Rochester, 2001).

The composition of boards of nonprofit organizations in Israel should also be viewed in the context of the development of the third sector prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948. The founders of third sector organizations in Israel were Zionist pioneers who immigrated to Palestine from European countries, in particular from Eastern Europe, to develop and provide social, cultural, and health services to the Jewish population. These services subsequently became the national institutions of the State of Israel. Thus, during the British Mandate, the governing and representative bodies of the Jewish community included representatives of Zionist movements (Gidron, 1992; 1997), most of whom were European and men. Board composition of nonprofit organizations is therefore deeply rooted in the history of third sector development in Israel prior to and after the establishment of the State of Israel. Although Israel has undergone significant changes in terms of greater participation of disadvantaged groups in political institutions this is less apparent in participation in third sector organizations. The findings show, however, that the second generation of immigrants—especially those who were born in Israel—tends to participate more than their parents.

The second major group of factors that can explain board composition are those dependent on the organizations and these include selection criteria; recruitment methods; and organizational characteristics. Although "good" boards are those whose members represent different backgrounds and various views and perspectives (Liederman, 1999), in practice these criteria are actually less important. The findings show that the most important selection criteria are those emphasizing social connections and personal and professional skills as opposed to representativeness. Several explanations can be provided for these findings. First, nonprofit organizations may look for more suitable members in terms of achieved status (i.e., professional skills and experience) than ascribed status (i.e., gender, age, ethnicity, or religion). The main disadvantage of a representative system, therefore, is that board members may not have the expertise and experience in fields such as financial management, personnel management, and so on, that would be desirable skills to have available on the board. Under-representation of those groups who are younger and have not attained higher education may thus be attributed to the belief that more members on boards who are generally less experienced and who are not professional experts can lead to boards that are less active and effective and unable to carry out their legal responsibilities to act on behalf the organization.

This belief is further supported by the recruitment methods employed by voluntary organizations, which shows that although those chosen through elections are expected to have the necessary qualifications to serve as board members, in

practice, most of the selection methods used by organizations surveyed relied quite heavily on the use of informal contacts and personal networks. Using social networks is often a relatively quick and easy way to find people with the right skills and experience who are willing to be board members, but it usually prevents outsiders from proposing themselves as potential board members. Furthermore, people volunteer in response to specific invitations from people they know well and if volunteering is seen as a desired activity among their circle of friends and colleagues (Clary *et al.*, 1992; Davis, 1997; Harris and Rochester, 2001). Thus, those who are already board members turn to their peers and invite them to join the board of which they are themselves members. In this way, they tend to preserve and perpetuate the existing board's composition. Some may argue that, because of the money involved in these organizations, members of very high caliber are needed. One of the common criticisms of boards that select their own members, however, is that this method can lead to a narrow, closed, and self-perpetuating elite and a lack of board representation of the constituencies the organization is supposed to serve and represent (Cornforth and Edwards, 1998).

In spite of the reasons used to justify the present composition of most boards, it would be desirable for boards to adopt recruitment policies that will incorporate and balance both approaches to board member selection: i.e., the stewardship model, which favors acquiring members who already have skills, professional background and expertise, and the democracy model, which supports democracy and diversity in terms of constituency representation. It is therefore important to encourage broader citizen participation to attract a greater diversity of candidates. To make these changes, nonprofit organizations have to adopt firm guidelines for the selection or recruitment of new board members that should include more democratic methods such as advertising vacancies and making appointments subject to objective assessments of the organization membership.

The study results raise several questions that need further research. For example, this study did not interview board members with respect to their motivations to serve on boards or how they were selected. Furthermore, it would be of interest to probe to what extent board members are also members of other boards. More research is also necessary to examine the attitudes of those who have the necessary qualifications to become board members and the reasons why they do not become involved in such voluntary activities.

In addition, more research is necessary to determine additional organizational characteristics that either prevent or encourage selection of board members that are more representative of their constituencies. Longitudinal studies that follow after the changes organizations undergo during their life cycles could illuminate how these changes influence board composition, as well as the recruitment methods and selection criteria they adopt, and the corresponding implications for organizational effectiveness and outcomes. For these purposes, larger samples of organizations and random sampling procedures may enable more extensive

cross-sectional analyses and provide better and more comprehensive insights into the factors affecting board composition. These may provide us with more data regarding the question of how to encourage people to increase their civic participation, as well as ways to make organizations more democratic and open to those groups that are presently underrepresented on boards of nonprofit organizations.

Nevertheless, several implications can be drawn from the findings of the present study. First, to bring about more democratization in voluntary organizations and enable better constituency representation on boards—particularly with regard to those that are dependent on public funding—it is necessary to make financial support conditional on the inclusion of constituency representation on boards and in other organizational activities, as has been done in some governmental projects such as neighborhood renewal projects in Israel in other similar programs in other countries like the United States. Second, since one of the barriers to more democratic participation is that people lack sufficient knowledge and understanding of governance, it is very important to tackle these knowledge deficiencies. Specific courses and training programs should be developed for those populations that are underrepresented on boards. The major purpose of such training programs should be to increase awareness of the importance of civic participation through board membership, and to provide people with the knowledge and skills that will qualify them to become board members. This can encourage younger individuals, women, and those from deprived groups in the population, to become more involved in voluntary organizations and to exert influence on the decisions that may affect and improve their lives.

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