



## The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare

Volume 45  
Issue 2 *June*

Article 2

2018

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#### Recommended Citation

Boehm, Amnon; Ali Saleh Darawshy, Neveen; and Boehm-Tabib, Esther (2018) "Social Workers and Politics: Direct Political Involvement and Encouragement of Client Involvement in Politics," *The Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/jssw/vol45/iss2/2>

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# Social Workers and Politics: Direct Political Involvement and Encouragement of Client Involvement in Politics

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*The research focused on two aspects of political involvement among social workers. The first was the direct political involvement of social workers on behalf of their clients, and the second, the social workers' encouragement of their clients' involvement in political activity. The main purpose of the research was to identify the factors that explain these two types of political involvement among social workers. The data were collected by means of a structured questionnaire from a research sample of 165 social workers in 50 social services departments in Israel. The findings indicate that the factors of the community (as opposed to clinical) field of practice, political self-efficacy, management support, low level of perceived organizational politics, and work in a rural setting contribute most to the explanation of political involvement of social workers. The perception of political involvement as a professional activity did not explain its prevalence among the social workers. The article discusses the theoretical and practical implications of the findings.*

*Key Words: social workers, politics, involvement, clients*

## Introduction

The political involvement of social workers is essential because they work in a political arena. The environments in which social workers operate are characterized by power struggles and conflicts of interest; therefore, in order to promote change, they often have to influence the political system (Domanski, 1998; Patel, 2011; Vick, 2012). The political involvement of social workers is based on fundamental values of the profession such as commitment to social justice, equal rights, and fair division of resources and power (Rush & Keenan, 2014). Their task is to work within the political system to promote disadvantaged people and serve as their personal and collective advocates (DeFilippis, Fisher, & Shragge, 2009; Reisch & Jani, 2012). In their different positions, social workers are expected to function in the political system as mediators, agents of change, advocates, and lobbyists (Domanski, 1998).

In addition to direct political involvement, social workers are also expected to encourage their clients to participate in political activity. The aim of client involvement in the political process is to allow them to play a role in decision-making processes that affect their lives (Ohmer, 2007; Postle & Beresford, 2005). Social workers also need to encourage clients to engage in politics because of the changes the clients are expected to undergo as a result of social work intervention programs, which are often associated with political processes (Saleebey, 1997). Encouraging the political involvement of clients may also be a means of raising public awareness of their suffering and transforming their cases into general social issues that warrant social-community solutions (Mendes, 2007).

The ability of clients to influence the political system reflects a process of personal and community empowerment. It contributes to the ability of clients to progress from a condition of helplessness to one in which they have an impact on their own living conditions. Empowerment by means of political involvement contributes a shift from the margins to the center of society, where the clients have a voice, take initiative, and work on behalf of themselves and the collective. Political involvement empowers clients by bringing them together with others in the same situation, raising their critical awareness of institutions, and increasing their self-efficacy

regarding the generation of change (Author's own; East & Roll, 2015; Song, 2013; Wu, 2010).

The present research examined the degree to which social workers participate directly in political systems and the degree to which they support their clients' political involvement. The main purpose of the research was to investigate the factors that contribute to both these aspects of political involvement. As a first study on this subject, it encompassed a comprehensive examination of several personal characteristics (political self-efficacy, perception of political involvement as a professional activity, and clinical or community field of social work practice), as well as several organizational-administrative characteristics (management support for political activity and the perceived organizational politics of the social services department) related to the political sphere. The research examined the relationships and relative contribution of each of these characteristics to the involvement of social workers in the political system and their encouragement of their clients' political involvement.

## Theoretical Background

### *Political Involvement*

Political involvement is defined in terms of the power that citizens have to influence the conditions of their lives. It refers to a redistribution of the power that enables the have-not citizens to play a role in economic and political processes, so that they can participate in and influence the political system. Verba and others (1995) argued that political participation, that is, activities conducted by ordinary citizens in order to affect political outcomes, is the most important means by which citizens can make their interests and preferences known.

Political involvement includes presenting the government with an agenda and obtaining a response to the relevant issues. The participants become players whose position must be considered (Cebolla-Boado & Ortiz, 2014; Verba, Lehman, & Brady, 1995). Political involvement also refers to activity by which the interests, aspirations, and demands of citizens have an effect on key figures in the government and on the decisions they make (Fennema & Tillie, 2001; Irvin & Stansbury, 2004; Kerrissey & Schofer, 2013).

The definition of the political involvement of social workers is similar, concentrating on the effort to influence the political system in order to promote the rights of disadvantaged social groups (DeFilippis et al., 2009; Domanski, 1998; Haynes & Mickelson, 2006; Reisch & Jani, 2012). The political involvement of social workers and their clients is aimed at improving their access to information, influencing policy, affecting the distribution of funds, implementing programs, and developing and introducing services. Social workers use different means to achieve these goals, such as advocacy, lobbying, negotiations, persuasion, disseminating information, and public protest (Chui & Gray, 2004; Domanski, 1998; Ritter, 2008). As noted, in this research we examined the direct political involvement of social workers on behalf of their clients and the degree to which they supported their clients' political involvement.

*The perception of political involvement as a professional activity*

As discussed in the introduction, there is much support for the political involvement of social workers, and there is also evidence that social workers are active in this respect (Domanski, 1998; Patel, 2011; Vick, 2012). However, in many cases, social workers view social and political activism as inappropriate for their professional practice. Some may view the political system as foreign and contradictory to the values of the social work profession. Social workers often see political involvement as an activity that is not objective, which involves unfair exploitation of the foci of power and is thus liable to distract them from the systematic work the profession requires. In fact, "politics" is often considered a dirty word, evoking an image of aggressiveness that clashes with the professional image of sharing and acceptance (Haynes & Mickelson, 2006; Mendes, 2007). Accordingly, many social workers avoid the centers of power in the community and prefer to focus on clinical therapy (Almog-Bar, Weiss-Gal, & Gal, 2015; Mendes, 2007), the development of intervention methods, and research, all detached from the political arena (Reisch & Jani, 2012).

A noteworthy aspect of this view is the objection of social workers to adopting intervention methods that they view as contradicting their perception of the profession (Lee-Treweek, 1997), particularly when the methods seem to jeopardize the

professional process or values (Baines, 2004). In some cases, such resistance intensifies to the point of considering resignation (Abramovitz, 2005; Baines, 2008). Accordingly, social workers' perceptions regarding the professional nature (or lack thereof) of political involvement are likely to lead to different levels of involvement.

Accordingly, it can be expected that those involved in community practices will be more likely, compared with those involved in private-clinical practice, to participate in political activity and to encourage their clients to be involved politically. In community practice it is particularly important to understand the politics of the community and the broader environment; to become acquainted with stakeholders, who in many cases have different and conflicting aims, goals, and interests; and to work for changes in the political system (Checkoway, 1995; Das, O'Neill, & Pinkerton, 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2008; Twelvetrees, 1991; Weil, 1996). In this respect, community practice is not limited to intellectual and technical activities, such as analysis, consideration, and evaluation of information, but also—in fact, mainly—includes activities of persuasion, negotiation, and dissemination of information (Author's own).

### *Political Self-Efficacy*

The concept of self-efficacy is based on social cognitive and social learning theories. Self-efficacy refers to the individual's evaluation of his or her ability to perform the actions required in order to deal with future situations (Bandura, 1986, 1997). Research on this subject has shown that self-efficacy contributes significantly to a wide variety of tasks, level of performance, persistence, attainment of aims and goals, and actions that involve challenges beyond common tasks (Dull, Schleifer, & McMillan, 2015; Wang & Zhang, 2016). However, it is important to note that a person's general self-efficacy may vary across situations, and it is not an all-encompassing quality (Bandura & Jourdan, 1991). Self-efficacy is specific to each task or situation (Pintrich & Schunk, 1995). Therefore, in the present research, we examined political self-efficacy—people's faith in their ability to influence the political system, perform political tasks, participate in politics, and generate change. Political self-efficacy

has been found to be one of the factors that affects the level of involvement in politics (Ritter, 2008; Verba et al., 1995).

### *Management Support*

Management support of employees is critical to their motivation. Research has shown the importance and influence of the managers in organizations (Buick, Blackman, O'Donnell, O'Flynn, & West, 2015; Schult, Galway, Awosika, Schmunk, & Hodgson, 2013), particularly on the introduction of changes in the organization and its services (Harris & Ogbonna, 2002); the development of the organizational culture (Schein, 1992); and the mediation and coordination of conflicting requirements that arise from the external and internal environments (Fleming & Spicer, 2004). This also holds for the influence of managers in welfare organizations, who are likely to play a central role in shaping values and norms regarding political activity. Social workers employed in the social services are affected by the overall view of the management (Author's own; Postle & Beresford, 2005).

### *Organizational Politics*

Organizational politics is a unique aspect of the study of interpersonal relations in the workplace, and has been discussed extensively in literature on the motivation of employees (Author's own; Vigoda-Gadot & Talmud, 2010). Organizational politics refers to terms such as "power" and "influence," and to people's ability to influence matters in favor of their goals (Salancik & Pfeffer, 1977). Organizational politics involves the promotion of personal interests that conflict with the interests of the organization or of other employees (Meisler & Vigoda-Gadot, 2014). Organizations characterized by organizational politics are guided less by professional, technical, or scientific considerations, and more by interactions of negotiation and persuasion (Gummer, 1990). Organizational politics are expressed when members of an organization identify foci of power and exploit them to obtain personal support or to realize programs or policies that they see as desirable (Author's own, 2011; Ferris, Russ, & Fandt, 1989).

When organizational politics are prominent in a social services department, the social workers are more likely to participate actively

in the political system in order to achieve their professional tasks; in order to achieve their goals, they need to focus their actions on influence and negotiation; for the same reason, they are likely to encourage their clients to take an active part in the political system.

### *Hypotheses*

The theoretical literature gives rise to the following hypotheses:

- A positive correlation will be found between the perception of political involvement as professional and: (a) the political involvement of social workers (as part of their professional role) and (b) social workers' encouragement of the political involvement of their clients.
- Involvement in community (rather than clinical) social work practice will contribute to: (a) the political involvement of social workers and (b) social workers' encouragement of the political involvement of their clients.
- A positive correlation will be found between political self-efficacy of social workers, as well as: (a) their political involvement and (b) their encouragement of their clients' political involvement.
- A positive correlation will be found between management support of political involvement and (a) the political involvement of social workers and (b) the social workers' encouragement of their clients' political involvement.
- A positive correlation will be found between perceived organizational politics and (a) the political involvement of social workers and (b) their encouragement of their clients' political involvement.



## Method

### *Sample*

The research was conducted among social workers employed in social services departments in Israel. About 50 of the country's 123 departments of social services were randomly sampled. The sample included 165 social workers. Two hundred and sixty questionnaires were sent randomly to the departments, depending on the size of each department (2 to 7 social workers in each); 165 were returned (63.46% response rate). The majority of respondents was born in Israel (90.3%), and most were women (84.2%). The average age of the respondents was 37.12 (between 24 and 54 years). More than half of the respondents held bachelor's degrees in social work (63%), and the rest (37%) held master's degrees (in Israel, a bachelor's degree in social work is the minimum qualification for employment in the field). The majority of respondents were employed in the clinical field of practice (69.1%), and the others engaged in macro social work, that is, community or administrative work (30.9%). The mean length of time in the social work profession was approximately 11.28 years (ranging from 1 to 36 years). Most of the respondents were employed in urban social services departments (61%) and the others in local or regional council departments (rural areas) (39%).

### *Research Instruments*

*Political involvement scale.* The measure of political involvement was based on the earlier work of Verba et al. (1995) and its translation by Gilboa (2000). The scale includes 14 items representing political activities. In correspondence with the research goals, two aspects of political involvement were examined. Regarding the first, the political involvement of social workers, the respondents were asked to note the degree of their political involvement as part of their professional work in each item presented. Regarding the second aspect, the social workers' encouragement of the political involvement of their clients, the respondents were asked to mark the degree to which they encouraged their clients' involvement in the activities represented by the respective items. In both sets of items, the ranking was graded on a five-point scale, where 1 = not at all, 2 = slightly, 3 = moderately, 4 = to a great degree, and 5 = to a very great degree.

*Scale of perception of political involvement as part of the social work profession.* The scale measuring the perception of political involvement was based on earlier research on social workers' involvement in the recruitment of resources (Author's own, 2006), which was adapted for the present research. The scale includes 11 statements. The items represent two opposing views of political involvement: negative (it is not professional), such as "political involvement is an activity that dirties the hands of social workers," "it's an appropriate activity for politicians or other groups, but not for social workers" (reverse), and a positive (professional) view of political involvement as part of the profession, represented by statements such as: "politics is an activity based on professional knowledge in social work." The respondents were asked to mark the degree to which they agreed with each of the statements regarding the political involvement of social workers as part of their professional work, on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = 0.89$ .

*Political self-efficacy scale.* The measure of political self-efficacy was based on the work of Verba et al. (1995), which was translated to Hebrew (Gilboa, 2000). The scale reflects the respondent's inner belief in his or her ability to understand and influence political processes. The respondents were asked to rank their agreement with the items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = 0.80$ .

*Management support for political involvement scale.* The scale was based on an earlier measure developed to assess the general support of organizational directors (Zeitz, Johannesson, & Ritchie, 1997), which was adapted for the support for political involvement. The scale included 7 items, such as "the management guides the employees to participate in politics," and "the management encourages employees to participate in activities related to political systems." The respondents were asked to mark the degree to which each of the items was true for the management of their social services department (the department manager, team leader, or others who directed their departments), on a scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (strongly agree). The reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = 0.81$ .

*Scale of perceived organizational politics.* The POPS questionnaire, based on earlier research (Ferris et al., 1989; Kacmar & Carlson,

1994), was translated to Hebrew (Vigoda, 2000) and used to assess the organizational politics of the respondents' departments. Organizational politics was defined as the degree to which members of the organization perceive the organizational environment as political, unfair, and directed to promote the goals of the strong and influential. The respondents were asked to rank their agreement with each of 9 items on a scale ranging from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree). The reliability of the scale was  $\alpha = 0.80$ .

*Questionnaire on personal details.* The questionnaire was designed to collect the variables of personal and professional background, such as age, gender, marital status, education, professional experience, field of practice (clinical or community work), and location of the department (urban or rural).

### *Procedure*

After obtaining permission from the Ministry of Social Services and Social Affairs to conduct the research, a request was submitted to the managers of the social services department. All the managers agreed to participate in the research. Two master's degree students of social work distributed the questionnaire in the departments. The questionnaire included a consent form to be signed by the social workers; among other things, it stated that they were not required to complete the questionnaire and that they could stop answering it at any point.

## Findings

### *The Descriptive Variables*

The data presented in Table 1 indicate that the reliability of the dependent research variables, according to Cronbach's alpha, ranged from  $\alpha = 0.80$  to  $\alpha = 0.95$ . The mean of the variable of encouragement of political involvement by clients was higher than that of the social workers' own political involvement (see Table 1).

Table 1: Reliability coefficients, means and standard deviations of the research variables (N = 165)

Variability	Reliability	Mean	Standard Deviation
The social worker's political involvement	0.92	1.84	0.80
Encouragement of clients' political involvement	0.95	2.35	0.99
Management support	0.81	1.94	0.73
Political self-efficacy	0.80	3.38	0.86
View of political involvement	0.89	3.56	0.74
Perceived organizational politics	0.80	3.00	0.70

To examine the contribution of the independent variables to the explanation of the dependent variables, we performed multivariate analysis. Two regressions were performed for each of the dependent variables (encouragement of the political involvement of clients, and the social worker's political involvement). The background variables of education, length of time in the profession, type of social services department (urban or rural) were entered as control variables. In addition, the independent variables of main field of practice, political self-efficacy, perception of political involvement as professional, management support, and perceived organizational politics were also entered into the regression.

The background variables of gender and country of birth were not included, as there were not enough men or immigrants, and the t tests did not reveal any significant differences. The age of the social workers was not examined, because the Pearson's correlation in the pre-test did not indicate a significant correlation (see Table 2).

Table 2: Multiple regression analysis of the relationship between the independent variables and the social worker's political involvement

	Direct political involvement of the social worker			Support for political involvement by clients		
	t	$\beta$	B	t	$\beta$	B
Education	.528	.036	.058	-.790	.057	-.114
Years in profession	-1.642	-.112	-.013	-.629	-.045	-.006
Main field of practice	4.248	.304	.608	4.072***	.306	.763
Rural or urban social services department	-1.882	-.129	-.204	-2.222*	-.160	-.316
Political self-efficacy	2.188*	.158	.142	2.233*	.169	.189
Professional view of political involvement	.312	.021	.022	-.056	-.004	-.005
Management support	4.016**	.279	.297	2.038*	.149	.197
Perceived organizational politics	-2.464*	-.168	-.182	-2.348*	-.168	-.227
R <sup>2</sup>	.32			.25		
Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>	29.			21		
F	9.08			6.48		

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

The regression model of social workers' political involvement was found to be significant ( $p < 0.001$ ,  $F = 9.08$ ), and to explain 29% of the variance. Field of practice provided the most significant explanation of variance in the social worker's political involvement, followed by management support, perceived organizational politics (in a negative direction), and political self-efficacy.

The regression model of social workers' encouragement of the political involvement of clients was found to be significant

( $F = 6.48, p < 0.001$ ) and to explain 21% of the variance. Field of practice, that being involved in community practice, as compared with individual case work practice, provided the most significant explanation of variance in the social worker's encouragement of clients to participate in politics, followed by perceived organizational politics (negatively), political self-efficacy, type of social services department (rural or urban), and management support.

## Discussion

In this research we examined the factors that promote and deter the political involvement of social workers and their encouragement of the political involvement of clients. The research findings show that social workers encouraged their clients to be politically involved (according to their responses to the questionnaire) to more than a slight degree but less than a moderate degree, and that they personally participated in politics to less than a slight degree. One explanation for the finding that the social workers tended to encourage their clients' involvement slightly more than they participated directly in politics might be associated with the generally accepted methods of social work, which focus on client involvement (Croft & Beresford, 2008; Seden & Ross, 2007) and client empowerment (Author's own; East & Roll, 2015; Song, 2015; Wu, 2010).

The research findings regarding the minimal political involvement of social workers are consistent with earlier research that showed little involvement of social workers on the social-political level, and more concentration of involvement on the clinical level (Almog-Bar et al., 2015; Haynes & Mickelson, 2006; Mendes, 2007). These findings, along with those of earlier studies, underscore the importance of identifying the factors that contribute to the political involvement of social workers and their encouragement of clients to participate in politics.

### *The Perception of Political Involvement as a Professional Activity*

The research findings show that, contrary to our hypothesis, the perception of political involvement as part of the social work profession did not explain the political involvement of the social workers or their support for their clients' political involvement.

These findings contradict earlier research that indicated a correlation between professional perceptions and activity associated with the respective views (Baines, 2008; Lee-Treweek, 1997). Perhaps the nature of the social worker's role, which focuses on clinical activity, as well as the need to receive clients for individual therapy (Almog-Bar et al., 2015) prevents social workers from fulfilling their commitment to political activity.

These findings might also be explained by the dual loyalty of social workers in their organizations of employment. On the one hand, they are loyal to the profession and the code of ethics, values, and ideology of the profession, but on the other hand, they are loyal to the organization that employs them, in this case, the local government (Author's own; Gal & Weiss-Gal, 2013). Perhaps the social workers' organizational affiliation, the demands and expectations of the organization, and the social workers' loyalty to the local authorities hinders them from becoming politically active. Social workers in social service departments are employed by and are subordinate to the local authority or municipality, and are thus obligated to maintain the political stability of the system. In light of this situation, it would be interesting to conduct further research to examine the relationship of loyalty to the organization, on the one hand, and to the profession, on the other hand, with the political involvement of social workers and their support for their clients' political involvement.

Another explanation of the findings may be that those social workers who expressed a favorable view of political involvement, and particularly those with a very favorable view, might consider minimal political activity (especially due to discouragement by the organization) as inadequate, compared with those social workers who perceived political involvement as unfavorable.

### *Working in Community Practice*

According to the research findings, work in the field of community practice explained the political involvement of social workers, as well as their support for their clients' political involvement, more than any other factor examined did. These findings are not surprising.

Social workers who work on the community level, compared with those working on the individual and family levels, are more involved in politics as part of their jobs. Community workers direct their activity towards change in the overall system, including the community power structure, and this requires them to negotiate with the political system (Checkoway, 1995; Das et al., 2015; Rubin & Rubin, 2008; Twelvetrees, 1991; Weil, 1996). It is also noteworthy that the findings show that community practice contributed not only to the personal and professional involvement of the social workers, but also to their encouragement of clients to participate in political activity.

### *Political Self-Efficacy*

The research findings indicated a contribution of political self-efficacy to the explanation of the social workers' political involvement and their encouragement of the political involvement of their clients. These findings are consistent with cognitive-social theory, according to which self-efficacy affects people's choices and the degree of effort they are willing to invest in given situations (Bandura, 1991), as well as their decisions regarding their degree of involvement in a given activity. Political involvement involves concrete political experience and familiarization with the complex political map, and it requires reciprocity and appropriate reactions to a variety of stakeholders. Political self-efficacy evidently contributes to the involvement of social workers in coping with complex tasks (Dull et al., 2015; Wang & Zhang, 2016).

Another possible explanation of the contribution of self-efficacy to political involvement is related to the perception of politics as an activity that is foreign and not an unequivocally integral part of the field of social work. In this case, personal self-efficacy contributes to involvement in political tasks, even though they are not perceived as an integral to the profession.

### *Management Support*

The findings show that management support helped explain the political involvement of social workers and their encouragement of their clients' political involvement. These findings are consistent with those of other studies that have highlighted the crucial importance of the manager in motivating



employees of an organization (Buick et al., 2015; Schult et al., 2013). Similarly, social workers in social service departments are influenced by the overall view of management (Postle & Beresford, 2005). The findings might also be explained by the structure in which the research participants worked: such social workers are subordinate to local government authorities, which are led by influential elected officials, and they need the support of their managers to gain the legitimation of the leaders of the local governments.

It should be noted that although the significance of the manager's support was significant in explaining the degree to which social workers encourage their clients to participate in politics, this factor explained the direct political involvement of the social workers to a greater degree. Apparently, the social workers needed greater support from their managers in order to act directly. It appears that the social workers perceived the political involvement of clients (with their encouragement) as less threatening compared with their own direct involvement.

#### *Perceived Organizational Politics as a Barrier to Political Involvement*

The findings of the present research reveal an opposite trend to that described in the research hypotheses, namely, that perceived organizational politics would be correlated with more extensive political involvement. That hypothesis was based on the reasoning that social workers in social services departments characterized by strong organizational politics would be more likely to take active roles in the political arena in order to achieve their professional tasks. However, it emerges that the perception of strong organizational politics actually hindered the political involvement of the social workers, as well as their encouragement of the political involvement of their clients.

Apparently, it is necessary to differentiate between a perception of organizational politics that reflect a tendency towards political action in order to achieve organizational and personal goals, and organizational politics that represent an inclination to engage in politics in order to achieve professional goals. In the present research, the perceived organizational politics reflected an organizational system aimed at gaining personal power for the social workers (and not professional power or power for the

benefit of the clients), while the political involvement of the social workers (as examined in this research) reflected a professional goal of benefiting the clients.

### *Work in a Rural Area as Strengthening Political Involvement*

In addition to the issues covered by the research hypotheses, the research findings also indicated that the social workers in rural areas were more supportive of their clients' political involvement (but did not participate much in political activity themselves).

One possible explanation of this finding may be the much greater proximity and access of citizens to the sources of power in the smaller rural communities. It seems that the access of the citizens in rural areas to the sources of power provided the social workers with a more secure foundation for supporting their clients' political involvement. The proximity to the sources of power in rural communities is reflected in more social capital in rural compared with urban communities (Beaudoin & Thorson, 2004; Krishna & Shrader, 1999). The emphasis here is especially on linking social capital, based on the relationship of community members or clients with organizations that have power and influence beyond the community system (Aldrich & Meyer, 2015; Putnam, 2000).

Perhaps the social workers prefer to rely upon existing political ties to initiating and developing new political systems. It would be interesting to examine this subject in further research.

### *Limitations of the Research*

Alongside the advantages of this research, some limitations should be considered. First, the research sample consisted of social workers in social service departments (the largest group of social workers in Israel) and did not include other professional groups. It would be interesting to expand the research on this issue to additional organizations and populations. It is also important to investigate the awareness of political involvement and political activism among national-level decision makers and the academic faculty members who train social workers.

In addition, this research was conducted in Israel, and should be expanded to include additional countries, where the organizational and professional cultures relate differently to the

issues examined here. There are similarities and differences in the characteristics of political involvement in Israel and the U.S.. Israel and the United States are both democratic countries, but their respective political scenes are not the same. For example, the political activities in the two countries are motivated by different views regarding the welfare state. In the U.S., there is a clear neoliberal outlook, which focuses on the democratic value of the freedom of individuals to live their lives as they wish, with minimal intervention of society and the state. According to this view, individuals and groups in society should be allowed to act freely, based on their interests. Therefore, the intervention of the state in economic activity for the sake of the welfare of its citizens and realization of socioeconomic rights should be very limited. With regard to social workers in this context, it is important to note that state intervention focuses only on those who are weak and needy, who are unable to manage themselves or with the help of their immediate society without government intervention.

In comparison, although Israel no longer represents the view of social democracy (the opposite of the view of the U.S.), it still bears some characteristics of that perspective. Accordingly, the political arena attributes great importance to the protection and realization of socioeconomic rights and to increasing social and economic equality by the state. The narrowing of economic and social disparity in society and promotion of social justice are given higher priority in Israel than in the U.S. Although there has been some retreat from this view in Israel in recent years, it is still stronger than in the U.S., in both the local and the national arenas.

Differences can be found in the political cultures of the two countries. For example, a critical culture in the democratic political arena in the U.S. sees the individual, not the regime, as sovereign. The element of individualism in Israel is weaker in comparison, and there is a constant expectation of citizens that the state will take care of them. In these respects and others, it is important to study the differences among countries regarding the topic of this research.

It would also be interesting to expand the research to groups that supply resources to organizations and, especially, to clients who receive social services. Finally, it should be noted that the research was exposed to common method bias and common source bias.

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