

VOLUNTARY MEMBERSHIP AND LIFE SATISFACTION IN MENA: EMPIRICAL FINDINGS FROM EGYPT, TUNISIA, AND TÜRKİYE

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Research on the voluntary sector increasingly examines how individual involvement in non-governmental organizations (NGOs) contributes to subjective well-being. While the societal benefits of NGO participation are well-documented, its potential to enhance life satisfaction at the individual level remains underexplored in the Middle Eastern context. This comparative study aims to fill this gap by examining the association between active membership in NGOs and life satisfaction in Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye, using data from the seventh wave of the World Values Survey (WVS). Binary logistic regression results show that active membership in NGOs is positively associated with life satisfaction in all three countries.

Keywords: voluntary organizations; life satisfaction; NGOs; Egypt; Tunisia; Türkiye.

INTRODUCTION

Life satisfaction, a key indicator of subjective well-being, reflects how individuals evaluate the overall quality of their lives. It encompasses not only material conditions but also social and psychological dimensions. According to Diener *et al.* (1985, 71) life satisfaction refers to “the judgement of how satisfied people are with their present state of affairs based on a comparison with a standard which each individual sets for him or herself; it is not externally imposed.” Given its capacity to reflect individual priorities, aspirations, and perceptions of quality of life, life satisfaction constitutes a key variable for research in the social sciences.

Numerous studies have explored the determinants of life satisfaction, identifying factors such as health status, income level, social engagement, having control over their lives, and employment status as significant contributors (Amati *et al.* 2018; Aysan and Aysan 2017; Palmore and Luikart 1972; van der Deijl *et al.* 2023). However, the role of participation in non-governmental organizations

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(NGOs) has received comparatively limited attention. Previous research has demonstrated that voluntary participation improves life satisfaction in a variety of ways, including by enhancing social capital and social connectivity, having a positive impact on health satisfaction, and bringing about greater happiness (Howard and Gilbert 2008; Binder 2015; Jiang *et al.* 2019; Borgonovi 2008; Anheier, Staes, and Grenier 2004; Marzana *et al.* 2020).

While several comparative studies have examined this relationship in Western European and North American contexts (Howard and Gilbert 2008; Wallace and Pichler 2009; Calvo *et al.* 2012), research focusing on the Middle East and North Africa (henceforth MENA) has been neglected. Even though the historical background of associations and NGOs in the MENA region is deeply rooted, their institutionalization is not the same as in Western European and North American countries. Examining civil society organizations in the MENA reveals them to be informal, religious-based groups with deep historical origins. Charity and social services are mainly operated through faith-based organizations in this region. Traditional forms of charity, including zakat (obligatory almsgiving), sadaqah (voluntary donations), and waqf (religious endowments), continue to play a significant role in shaping the landscape of social assistance (Casey 2016; Bortolazzi 2020).

This study investigates whether individuals who are members of NGOs report higher life satisfaction than those who are not, focusing on three MENA countries: Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye. The central hypothesis is that voluntary membership in NGOs is positively associated with life satisfaction, even when controlling for key socio-demographic and contextual variables. Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye were selected due to their cultural and religious commonalities, alongside their diverse political, economic, and social contexts, which offer a valuable comparative lens for this analysis.

Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye offer valuable comparative cases for understanding civil society dynamics in the MENA region. Egypt, with one of the largest populations in the MENA region, plays a central political and cultural role in this area. Tunisia, an Arab country geographically close to Europe, has historically maintained stronger ties with European institutions compared to many of its regional neighbors. Türkiye, a predominantly Muslim and ethnically Turkish country, is a NATO member with longstanding connections to Europe. These three countries represent the ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity of the MENA and are characterized by significant differences in their economic, political, and social development.

While they share certain cultural and religious similarities, their political trajectories differ. Egypt is often classified as a centralized state with limited political pluralism (Freedom House 2025). Tunisia, following the Arab Spring, has made considerable efforts toward democratization, although challenges persist (Freedom House 2025). Türkiye, despite its earlier modernization, has in recent

years experienced increased debate over aspects of democratic practices and institutional functioning (Freedom House 2025). These contextual differences provide an important backdrop for examining how voluntary participation in NGOs relates to individual life satisfaction across varying socio-political environments.

The comparison of these three different countries is particularly valuable for examining the relationship between voluntary participation in NGOs and life satisfaction. While they share a common religious background, the differences in their social and political environments may influence how NGOs contribute to well-being. This comparative analysis could provide new insights into how NGOs function in different Muslim-majority contexts and their potential role in enhancing life satisfaction in the broader Middle East. By exploring these distinct cases, this study aims to contribute to the existing literature on civil society participation and well-being, specifically in Muslim-majority countries, where the role of NGOs may be shaped by varying political and social factors.

This paper is organized as follows. First, the leading concepts related to the study will be evaluated briefly. With these concepts in mind, one may better grasp the relationship between life satisfaction and NGO participation. Data, variables, and method will be explained in the next section. In the third section, binary logistic regression results will be analyzed. Lastly, in consideration of the information discovered, NGOs' empowerment will be discussed.

LIFE SATISFACTION AND NGOS

Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a subjective well-being indicator that can be utilized in the assessment of welfare distribution (Pacek and Radcliff 2008; Veenhoven 1996). This parameter is significant since beyond objective circumstances, how people perceive those circumstances is measured. It evaluates life course in general rather than temporary emotional statements (Diener *et al.* 1985). People can give importance to different things and their priorities can change. For example, income's effect on subjective well-being is investigated to understand whether its effect is relative or absolute. Results show that it is not relative, an increase in income raises subjective well-being but this association is weak in higher income level (Diener *et al.* 1993). Hence, objective indicators may not reflect subjective well-being completely because of their weakness in assessing how people perceive them and how those indicators affect people's lives when other indicators are included (Tay, Kuykendall, and Diener 2015). Even though the validity of life satisfaction measurement is questioned because of its subjectivity, studies on life satisfaction show that it can be used for cross-cultural subjective well-being assessment (Diener *et al.* 1985; Tay *et al.* 2015). People's own evaluation of how satisfied they are with their lives are affected by other factors, such as income, jobs

and earning, health status, work and life balance, education and skills, social connections, civic engagement, environmental quality, and personal security (Aysan and Aysan 2017; Novara *et al.* 2023; OECD 2011; Palmore and Luikart 1972; Salinas-Jiménez *et al.* 2011). Life satisfaction is an important indicator to understand how people feel about their lives as well as how they perceive the quality of their lives.

Life satisfaction scores change from country to country due to the different conditions, but these scores are relatively lower in the MENA countries when compared with Western European countries. According to the World Happiness Report, the average life evaluation score in the MENA region is 5.1 whereas the average life evaluation score in Western European countries is 6.6 (Helliwell *et al.* 2023 34). Previous life satisfaction studies in the MENA countries focused mainly on the effect of institutional trust, corruption, and standard of living (Arampatzi *et al.* 2018; Ciziceno and Travaglino 2019). In the MENA region, dissatisfaction with the standard of living and widespread perceptions of corruption are strongly associated with lower life satisfaction. Corruption often undermines institutional trust, further contributing to this decline.

Non-Governmental Organizations and Civil Society in Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye

Civil society is not an isolated sphere; rather, it exists in a complex relationship with other social institutions, including the state, the market, and the family. While it is a distinct domain, civil society is shaped by and interacts with these other sectors (Evers 1995). Civil society provides the process through which individuals struggle and negotiate with each other and with the political and economic authorities. Various institutions like unions, voluntary associations, parties enable the individual to act publicly (Kaldor 2003, 585). Although civil society organizations have existed historically, their professionalization, formal structure, and social legitimacy have evolved over time (Bromley 2020).

NGOs are one subcategory of civil society organizations. There are some other names used as synonyms like nonprofit, third sector, and voluntary organizations. Evaluating NGOs is challenging due to the diversity of definitions concerning their scope and classification. One of the well-accepted definitions is structural and defines NGOs as the composition of five key features: formal, private, non-profit distributing, self-governing, and voluntary organizations (Salamon and Anheier 1992, 135). They vary according to their size and type, and they are classified based on their primary economic activity.

Civil society in Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye has not consistently improved due to interruptions in the countries' democratic histories caused by coups and occasional restrictions on civil society. According to Salamon (*et al.* 2017), the voluntary sector is not active in MENA countries as much as in the western

European countries. However, civil society plays a significant role in these countries like promoting democracy, supporting national development, and mitigating social risks.

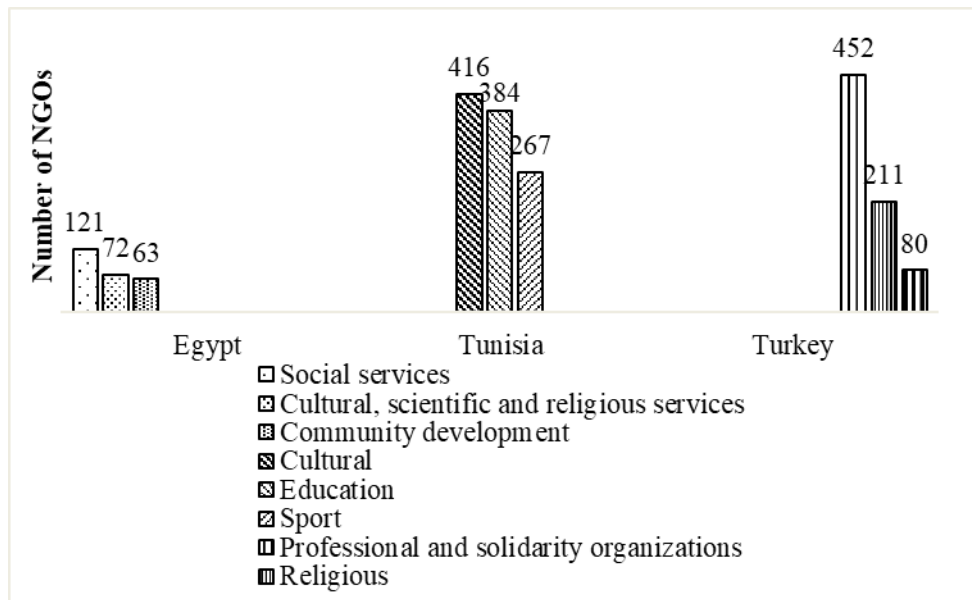
Data from Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye show the scope and diversity of NGOs in these countries. Egypt has 33291 registered NGOs, with the majority operating in social services (12716), followed by organizations focused on culture, science, and religion (7525), and community development (6655) (Ministry of Social Solidarity of Egypt 2023). Tunisia hosts 24834 licensed NGOs, with the most common types in culture (4970), education (4588), and sports (3188). Social and development NGOs follow them (Institut de Formation et d'Études Diplomatiques 2023). Türkiye has 101402 registered NGOs, most of which are professional and solidarity organizations (38288), followed by religious (17944) and sports organizations (6808) (Directorate General for Relations with Civil Society 2023).

Egypt has the largest population in the MENA countries with 104 million people and it is the biggest Arab country in terms of population in the world. Türkiye has the third largest population with 84 million people, whereas Tunisia has a smaller population of almost 12 million (Turkish Statistical Institute 2022). When adjusted for population, Tunisia has the highest NGO density (2080 per million people), followed by Türkiye (1197) and Egypt (319). While civil society organizations in these countries vary by type and focus, common patterns by country can be observed: social services are prominent in Egypt, expressive NGOs (*e.g.*, cultural and sports organizations) are widespread in Tunisia, and Türkiye shows strong representation in community-based solidarity and religious organizations.

Despite this activity, the political climate in the region imposes important limitations. NGOs involved in civic engagement, human rights, or environmental issues are sometimes perceived as politically sensitive and may face restrictions such as limitations on foreign funding, legal barriers, and travel bans for members (Carnegie Endowment 2025). These constraints shape both the roles' NGOs can play and the extent to which they contribute to individual and collective well-being.

Figure 1

Top three NGO membership density of different categories per 1 million people in Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye



Note: Data is taken from (Ministry of Social Solidarity of Egypt 2023), (Institut de Formation et d'Études Diplomatiques 2023), (Directorate General for Relations with Civil Society 2023).

Voluntary Organization Membership and Life Satisfaction

Volunteering is an umbrella term that includes voluntary work and voluntary membership. One definition state that “Volunteering is a form of altruistic behavior. Its goal is to provide help to others, a group, an organization, a cause, or the community at large, without expectation of material reward” (Musick and Wilson 2008, 13). Along these lines, research has studied the positive effects of volunteering on life satisfaction (Okulicz-Kozaryn and Morawski 2021; Hansen *et al.*, 2018; Van Willigen 2000). This article, however, specifically examines the impact of voluntary membership on life satisfaction.

Voluntary work and voluntary membership have different meanings even though they intertwine with each other. Voluntary work describes work that is unpaid, formal through organizations, and for the public good, whereas voluntary membership can be beneficial for both NGO members and the public. Member benefit voluntary organizations prioritize and give service to their members, while public benefit voluntary organizations serve the public rather than their members (Smith 1993). In other words, not all members do voluntary work, but voluntary work is a formal way of doing unpaid work for the good of the public. For

example, sport clubs' members may take advantage of being a member instead of doing voluntary work for the public good (Smith 1993; Musick and Wilson 2008). However, not all types of NGOs aim to benefit their members. Some seek to reduce inequality and poverty, strengthen relationships between those facing common issues, or empower disadvantaged groups, such as charitable organizations, women's organizations, and mutual aid organizations. However, this distinction is very hard to make since there are no clear-cut boundaries. Putnam (1993) also differentiates between internal and external effects of civil organizations. Increasing solidarity between people, social trust, and a shared sense of purpose are a few internal effects. He shares Tocqueville's thought about civil organizations that "feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and the understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men one upon another" (Putnam 1993, 90). Externally, they contribute to democracy with their organized form and 'interest aggregation' (Putnam 1993).

Studies show that voluntary involvement increases life satisfaction significantly (Binder and Freytag 2013; Binder 2015; Meier and Stutzer 2008; Jiang *et al.* 2019). There are different mechanisms through which volunteering has positive effects on well-being and life satisfaction, such as by enhancing social capital, community building, 'warm-glow', and a sense of belonging (Borgonovi 2008; Putnam 2000).

Gathering for common shared goals brings together people from different backgrounds and face-to-face interaction increases social capital. Since NGOs are formal organizations, they do not only gain more trust but also help strengthen trust between people (Jaysawal 2017). Altruistic behavior of volunteers in public benefit NGOs enhances the relationship between volunteers, beneficiaries, and supporters. NGOs contribute to the community-building process by providing social services, empowering disadvantaged groups, advocating rights, and supporting development. One reason for voluntary involvement is the 'warm glow' effect, as identified by Andreoni (1990). This effect suggests that individuals feel a sense of personal satisfaction when engaging in voluntary work. An example of this is evident in The American Red Cross advertisement, which encourages individuals to "feel good about yourself – give blood!" (Andreoni 1990, 464). A sense of belonging is another factor that has a positive effect on volunteering (Dallimore *et al.* 2018). Being a member of a voluntary organization increases interaction between people who have similar goals and coming together for a common purpose fosters a sense of belonging among individuals.

METHOD

The data is derived from the seventh wave of the World Value Survey (WVS) (Haerpfer *et al.* 2022) which is conducted every five years, considering various topics like social, religious, ethical, and cultural values, societal well-being,

social capital and organizational membership, economic values, corruption, migration, security, political participation, political culture, and socio-demographic information. The WVS is one of the few publicly available datasets that include detailed cross-national information on NGO participation and individual well-being in the MENA region. While most large-scale surveys tend to focus on Western or high-income countries, the WVS provides valuable and relatively rare insight into civil society participation within MENA contexts. This study uses the fifth version of the seventh wave, conducted between 2017 and 2022, based on face-to-face interviews. All statistical analyses were conducted using IBM SPSS Statistics.

The countries included in our sample are Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye. The total number of respondents from these three countries in the WVS dataset is 4823. After excluding cases with missing values on any of the variables used in the analysis, the final analytic sample consists of 4523 individuals: from Egypt (1112), from Tunisia (1140), and from Türkiye (2271). The survey was conducted in Egypt and Türkiye in 2018 and in Tunisia in 2019. The regression analyses were conducted on this final sample of 4523 respondents. These three countries were selected for their relevance to the study's regional focus and for the contrasting political and social contexts they represent within the broader MENA landscape.

Logistic regression model is used to investigate the relationship between life satisfaction and voluntary organizations membership, considering a series of control variables. Life satisfaction (dependent variable) can be measured with ordinal regression since in nature it is ordinal. However, one of the assumptions of ordinal logistic regression is proportional odds. Violation of it means that independent variables do not affect outcome variables consistently at different levels. The proportional odds assumption is not met in this analysis. Additionally, while linear logistic regression is also considered, one of the assumptions, normal distribution, is not met. Consequently, binary logistic regression is employed, and the dependent variable is recoded into two categories.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics of the model. To measure the effect of active membership in voluntary organizations on life satisfaction, the life satisfaction question is used as a dependent variable that asks participants "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days?" answers can range from 'completely dissatisfied' (1) to 'completely satisfied' (10) on a ten-point Likert scale.

To transform the life satisfaction variable into a binary outcome suitable for logistic regression, responses from 1 to 6 were coded as 0 (not satisfied), and responses from 7 to 10 as 1 (satisfied). While the average life satisfaction scores in the three countries studied – Egypt (5.87), Tunisia (5.52), and Türkiye (6.52) – cluster around 6, a threshold of ≥ 7 was chosen to distinguish respondents with clearly higher satisfaction from those with moderate or lower satisfaction. This cut-off reflects a meaningful separation that aligns with the distribution of the data and the conceptual goal of identifying genuinely satisfied individuals.

Several alternative thresholds (≥ 5 , ≥ 6 , and ≥ 7) were tested for robustness, with the ≥ 7 threshold providing the most stable and interpretable logistic regression estimates. Thresholds at 5 and 6 resulted in weaker model fit or less consistent results. This approach aligns with the binary recoding method used in Amati *et al.* (2018), who similarly adopted a cut-off to create a binary life satisfaction variable for logistic modelling. The distribution of the original variable, including descriptive statistics and a histogram, is presented in *Appendix A*.

Other explanatory variables in the model are socio-demographic characteristics: gender, age, household income, education level, marital status, employment status, state of health and feeling secure. Gender is coded as binary value 'male' (1) 'female' (0). Participants under the age of 18 were excluded from the dataset, as legal membership in many NGOs typically requires individuals to be adults. This ensures that the analysis focuses on respondents who are eligible to participate in voluntary organizations. The household income and education level variables used in this analysis are based on the recoded versions provided in the WVS dataset. Household income is presented as a three-point scale ranging from 'low' (1), 'medium' (2), to 'high' (3). Similarly, the education variable is available in a recoded form that simplifies the original eight categories (from 'early childhood education' to 'doctoral or equivalent education') into three broader levels: 'lower,' 'middle,' and 'higher.' These simplified versions were used to facilitate clearer interpretation and more robust statistical analysis. Marital status is reduced from six categories to four categories as 'never married' (1), 'divorced or separated' (2), 'widowed' (3), and 'married or living with partner' (4). This recoding reflects both theoretical and practical considerations. Marriage and living with partner are grouped together because both involve committed partnerships that are positively associated with subjective well-being. 'divorced' and 'separated' are combined due to their shared experience of relationship dissolution and the associated disruptions to emotional and social stability. In contrast, 'widowed' is kept as a separate category because the emotional impact of involuntary partner loss is distinct from the outcomes of separation or divorce (Gove and Shin 1989). This categorization enables a more meaningful interpretation of life satisfaction across different relationship statuses (Diener and Seligman 2004). Employment status is reduced from eight categories to four categories as 'student, homemakers or others' (1), 'unemployed' (2), 'retired' (3), and 'full time, part time and self-employed' (4). Student, homemaker, or other non-working categories grouped due to their shared status as not currently employed and limited labor market attachment. State of health is measured with the question "all in all, how would you describe your state of health these days?". It has a five-point Likert scale ranging from 'very good' (1) to 'very poor' (5), but its reversed form is used in the model. Feeling secure is assessed through the question, "How secure do you feel these days?" Responses are 'not at all secure' (1), 'not very secure' (2), 'quite secure' (3) and 'very secure' (4).

The main predictor variable in this study is being an active member in a voluntary organization. In the World Value Surveys, it is asked as “for each organization, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member or not a member of that type of organization?”. The types included in the research are religious organization, art-music or educational organization, labour union, environmental organization, professional association, humanitarian or charitable organization, consumer organization, self-help or mutual aid group, women’s group, and other organizations. Putnam (2000, 53) criticizes the practice known as ‘checkbook’ or ‘mail-order’ membership, in which members only pay fees without attending meetings or participating in activities. To prevent this, active members and the other two values are distinguished. Those who are active members of any of those organizations were assigned a value of 1. Conversely, individuals who are inactive or not a member of those organizations were assigned a value of 0. Binary logistic regression is done in two steps. In the first step, socio-demographic characteristics, state of health and feeling secure variables are taken into consideration. In the second step, active membership to voluntary organization is added to equation.

Table no. 1

Descriptive statistics of the model in the MENA

	Min	Max	Egypt	S.D.	Tunisia	S.D.	Türkiye	S.D.
Age	18	95	39.52	13.365	42.92	15.200	38.84	12.650
Scale of incomes	1	10	4.99	1.398	4.73	2.014	5.34	1.725
Educational level	1	3	1.82	.764	1.68	.704	1.59	.767
State of Health	1	5	3.57	.831	3.46	.860	3.84	.735
Feeling Secure	1	4	3.47	.670	3.40	.767	2.82	.610
Number of observations			1112		1140		2271	
			Egypt		Tunisia		Türkiye	
Gender (%)								
Male			52.1		47		50.1	
Female			47.9		53		49.9	
Marital Status (%)								
Never married			18.6		27.9		32.2	
Divorced or separated			4.40		4		2.8	
Widowed			8		6.7		2.6	

Table no. 1 (continued)

Married or living with partner			69		61.4		62.4	
Employment Status (%)								
Student, homemaker or other			40.8		34.2		30.7	
Unemployed			4.4		9.1		6.8	
Retired			4.3		6.9		6	
Full time, part time or self-employed			50.5		49.8		56.5	
Active Membership to Voluntary Organizations (%)								
Inactive or not a member			92.7		91.9		92.2	
Active member			7.3		8.1		7.8	
Number of observations			1 112		1 140		2 271	

RESULTS

Descriptive Results

The variable life satisfaction has connections to other crucial variables that impact it in distinct ways. *Table no. 2* below shows the descriptive statistics of life satisfaction scores by selected variables for Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye. Only categoric and ordinal variables are shown in *Table no. 2*, age is not shown as a scale variable. The socio-demographic characteristics will be evaluated first. It presents the average life satisfaction scores across categories of selected variables; no statistical associations or relationships are tested at this stage. In Egypt and Tunisia, women have slightly higher life satisfaction, whereas there is no difference in life satisfaction in terms of gender in Türkiye. In all three countries, people with higher income levels, as well as people with higher education levels also reported higher life satisfaction. For marital status, it can be observed that married people's life satisfaction level is higher than never married, divorced or separated, and widowed category in all countries. When the employment status is considered, retired people have higher life satisfaction scores while the unemployed have on the lowest life satisfaction in all three countries.

Looking at the state of health, people in the very poor and poor health categories have lower mean scores than people in good and very good health categories in all countries. People who feel secure also have higher life satisfaction scores for the three countries. Lastly, active members in voluntary organizations have higher life satisfaction when compared with inactive members or people who are not members in all countries.

Table no. 2

Average life satisfaction scores by selected variables of Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye

	Min	Max	Egypt Mean	S.D.	Tunisia Mean	S.D.	Türkiye Mean	S.D.
Gender								
Male	0	1	.39	.488	.35	.476	.54	.498
Female	0	1	.42	.493	.36	.480	.54	.498
Scale of incomes								
Low	0	1	.27	.445	.28	.452	.39	.489
Medium	0	1	.42	.494	.35	.478	.54	.498
High	0	1	.71	.470	.60	.493	.77	.419
Educational level								
Lower	0	1	.35	.479	.34	.474	.53	.499
Middle	0	1	.39	.489	.35	.477	.55	.498
Higher	0	1	.51	.501	.41	.493	.59	.493
Marital Status								
Never married	0	1	.38	.487	.32	.467	.53	.500
Divorced or separated	0	1	.39	.492	.33	.477	.46	.502
Widowed	0	1	.40	.494	.32	.471	.43	.500
Married or living with partner	0	1	.41	.492	.37	.484	.56	.496
Employment Status								
Student, homemaker or other	0	1	.40	.489	.37	.484	.53	.499
Unemployed	0	1	.37	.487	.19	.396	.48	.501
Retired	0	1	.48	.505	.50	.503	.60	.493
Full time, part time or self-employed	0	1	.40	.491	.35	.477	.55	.497
State of Health								
Very poor	0	1	.35	.493	.05	.229	.09	.302
Poor	0	1	.25	.434	.11	.317	.29	.458
Fair	0	1	.33	.470	.27	.443	.33	.470
Good	0	1	.43	.495	.44	.498	.59	.493
Very good	0	1	.66	.475	.62	.488	.78	.416
Feeling Secure								
Not at all secure	0	1	.17	.383	.10	.305	.52	.503
Not very secure	0	1	.35	.481	.28	.450	.41	.492
Quite secure	0	1	.35	.479	.31	.464	.56	.496
Very secure	0	1	.45	.498	.40	.491	.71	.456
Active membership to voluntary organizations								
Inactive or not a member	0	1	.39	.488	.34	.474	.53	.499
Active member	0	1	.57	.498	.49	.503	.68	.469

Results of Logistic Regression

To examine the effect of active membership in voluntary organizations on life satisfaction, binary logistic regression analyses were conducted separately for Egypt (N=1112), Tunisia (N=1140), and Türkiye (N=2271), controlling for gender, age, income level, education level, marital status, employment status, self-reported health, and feeling of security.

Model diagnostics indicate that the model (Step 1) including all control variables was statistically significant across countries (Omnibus test $p < .001$). Adding active membership in voluntary organizations in Step 2 resulted in a statistically significant change in the model (Egypt: $p = .020$; Tunisia: $p = .019$; Türkiye: $p = .035$), based on the Omnibus test. The increase in Nagelkerke R^2 after including the main independent variable was modest but consistent: 0.6% in Egypt (from .107 to .113), 0.6% in Tunisia (from .165 to .171), and 0.2% in Türkiye (from .168 to .170), suggesting that active membership contributes additional explanatory power to life satisfaction.

Hosmer and Lemeshow goodness-of-fit tests indicate acceptable model fit at both steps, with non-significant results across all countries in Step 2 (Egypt: $p = .390$; Tunisia: $p = .718$; Türkiye: $p = .062$). The classification accuracy of the models remained relatively stable between steps. In Egypt, accuracy slightly decreased from 66.0% to 65.7%; in Tunisia, it remained constant at 68.2%; and in Türkiye, it dropped marginally from 64.5% to 64.2%. Overall, the classification accuracy remained largely unchanged, suggesting that while active membership in voluntary organizations marginally contributes to explaining life satisfaction, its effect on improving predictive classification is limited.

The final model results (Step 2) are reported in *Table no. 3*, while detailed estimates for the first step (without the active membership variable) are provided in the *Appendix Table A*. As shown in *Table no. 3*, gender is not significant for all countries which means that there is no difference in life satisfaction between male and female. Age is statistically significant only in Egypt, where each one-unit increase in age is associated with a 2.5% increase in the odds of reporting higher life satisfaction, whereas age is not significant in Tunisia and Türkiye. Increase in income level brings along life satisfaction enhancement but not in all countries. Income level is statistically significant in Egypt and Türkiye but not in Tunisia. In Egypt, higher income increases the odds of life satisfaction by 61.5%, while in Türkiye, the increase in odds is 92.5%.

Some previous studies show that education has a positive effect on life satisfaction because of making better life conditions possible (Cheung and Chan 2009; Salinas-Jiménez, Artés, and Salinas-Jiménez 2011). Interestingly, in our study education level is a significant predictor only in Egypt, where a one-unit increase in education level increases the odds of reporting life satisfaction by 20.6%. This divergence may reflect contextual differences in how educational attainment translates into subjective well-being. For example, in Egypt, education

may carry more weight in shaping perceived social status or providing access to supportive networks, even when economic returns are limited. In contrast, in Tunisia and Türkiye, the instrumental benefits of education such as employment or income may be more influential, and their absence may weaken its link to life satisfaction. These interpretations remain speculative and highlight the need for further research on the mechanisms linking education and well-being across different sociopolitical and economic settings.

Among marital status categories, the only significant result appears in Türkiye, where being never married is associated with 25% lower odds of life satisfaction compared to those who are married or living with a partner.

Employment status is significant in Tunisia for two categories. Compared to employed individuals (full-time, part-time, or self-employed), being unemployed is associated with 40.8% lower odds of reporting life satisfaction, while being retired is associated with 121.6% higher odds.

State of health is one of the important indicators with a positive effect on life satisfaction, which mirrors other results from the literature on the topic (Palmore and Luikart 1972; Helliwell *et al.* 2023; Aysan and Aysan 2017). Self-rated health is a strong and consistent predictor across all three countries. A one-unit increase in health status increases the odds of reporting life satisfaction by 75.4% in Egypt, 117% in Tunisia, and 134.5% in Türkiye. Feeling secure is also statistically significant in all three countries, with individuals who feel secure having higher odds of reporting life satisfaction: 32.5% higher in Egypt, 29% higher in Tunisia, and 39.3% higher in Türkiye.

Finally, the effect of active membership in voluntary organizations supports the main hypothesis. Being an active member increases the odds of life satisfaction by 79.1% in Egypt, 74.8% in Tunisia, and 45.8% in Türkiye, holding all other factors constant.

Table no. 3

Logistic regression of life satisfaction in Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye

	Egypt			Tunisia			Türkiye		
	Coeff.	S.E.	O.R.	Coeff.	S.E.	O.R.	Coeff.	S.E.	O.R.
Gender (ref. Female)	-.337	.202	.714	-.053	.164	.948	-.071	.111	.931
Age	.025	.007***	1.025	.001	.006	1.001	.001	.005	.999
Scale of income	.479	.188*	1.615	.214	.122	1.239	.655	.098** *	1.925
Education level	.187	.092*	1.206	.057	.107	1.058	-.035	.064	.966

Table no. 3 (continued)

Marital Status (ref. Married or living with partner)									
Never married	.051	.205	1.052	-.097	.192	.907	-.287	.125*	.751
Divorced or separated	-.043	.321	.958	-.022	.344	.978	-.275	.287	.760
Widowed	.038	.259	1.039	.054	.292	1.05 ₅	-.290	.292	.749
Employment status (ref. Full time, part-time or self-employed)									
Student, homemaker or other	.018	.210	1.018	.260	.175	1.29 ₇	-.046	.123	.955
Unemployed	.209	.338	1.232	-.708	.290*	.492	-.116	.187	.890
Retired	.051	.342	1.052	.796	.291**	2.21 ₆	.396	.210	1.486
State of Health	.562	.090***	1.754	.775	.091** *	2.17 ₀	.852	.070** *	2.345
Feeling Secure	.281	.102**	1.325	.255	.095**	1.29 ₀	.332	.077** *	1.393
Active membership to voluntary organizations (ref. inactive or not member)	.583	.251*	1.791	.559	.238*	1.74 ₈	.377	.181*	1.458
Nagelkerke R square	.113			.171			.170		
Nagelkerke R square change	.006			.006			.002		

Note: *p < 0.5, **p < 0.01, ***p < 0.001

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Life satisfaction has become a widely studied topic in recent years, reflecting individuals' overall evaluation of their lives. It is a valuable measure because it helps to understand what factors are important to people in different social and political contexts. Among the various influences on life satisfaction, one area that has received growing attention is the role of voluntary participation, particularly through NGOs. NGOs serve various functions in society such as providing social services, creating social networks, and fostering a sense of community that may influence individuals' life satisfaction. Therefore, it is important to understand the impact of voluntary participation on life satisfaction. Previous studies have examined the influence of health, income, employment status, and education level on life satisfaction, but research on the impact of voluntary participation, particularly in the MENA region, is limited. This study analyzes the relationship between active membership in voluntary organizations and life satisfaction in

Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye, using individual-level data from the seventh wave of the World Values Survey. In addition to active membership, the analysis includes control variables such as gender, age, income, education, marital status, employment status, health, and perceived security in a logistic regression model. The findings reveal that health status, feeling secure, and active participation in voluntary organizations are positively associated with life satisfaction in all three countries. Gender, by contrast, does not show a statistically significant effect. These results are notable given that civil society engagement has traditionally played a less central role in the MENA region compared to Western Europe (Salamon *et al.* 2017). Nevertheless, active membership in voluntary organizations demonstrates a measurable positive association with life satisfaction in Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye.

Consistent with prior research, our findings show that health, income, employment status, perceived security, and active membership in voluntary organizations are positively associated with life satisfaction. These results support the hypothesis that active participation in voluntary organizations contributes positively to individuals' life satisfaction. As a result, civil society policies ought to prioritize the empowerment of NGOs, despite the ongoing debates regarding the nature of the relationship between the state and NGOs (*i.e.*, whether they are adversarial, supplementary, or complementary), as argued by Young (2000). Since the state, market, family, and NGOs depend on each other, they cannot be considered separately. NGOs operate in a distinct sphere: unlike the state, they are non-governmental and typically function independently of direct government control. Unlike the market, their primary focus is not profit, and unlike the family, they are organized entities with specific missions beyond individual households. By providing social services, humanitarian assistance, social networks, empowering disadvantaged groups, and contributing to development, NGOs can improve people's lives.

This study identifies a correlation between active NGO membership and life satisfaction; however, it does not establish causality. It is possible that individuals who are already more satisfied with their lives are more inclined to participate in voluntary organizations, rather than NGO involvement directly increasing life satisfaction. This directionality issue has been acknowledged in previous research. For instance, Bălătescu (2009), using World Values and European Values Survey data from Eastern European countries (1981–2004), found a positive association between participation in voluntary associations and happiness, while noting that the causal link remained ambiguous. Future research using longitudinal or experimental designs would be better suited to explore the direction and mechanisms of this relationship.

It is worth noting that social capital may act as a potential mediator in the relationship between voluntary organization membership and life satisfaction, as suggested in previous literature (*e.g.*, Shi *et al.* 2022). However, this study does not explicitly test such mediation effects, due to both theoretical and methodological

reasons. Even though the WVS includes certain indicators of social trust (*e.g.*, toward neighbors, family, people of the same religion or nationality), these do not capture the full complexity of social capital, which typically includes dimensions such as civic norms, associational trust, and network-based reciprocity. Moreover, mediation analysis would require a separate modelling strategy and clearer conceptual justification for selecting and aggregating trust measures into a coherent construct. Given that the primary objective of this study is to examine the direct relationship between active membership in voluntary organizations and life satisfaction, the mediating role of social capital falls beyond its current scope.

In conclusion, this study examines the relationship between NGO participation and life satisfaction across Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye. The findings show that active membership in voluntary organizations is positively associated with how individuals evaluate their lives. Future research should build on these results by exploring the causal pathways and mechanisms that explain this relationship.

Appendix

Table A

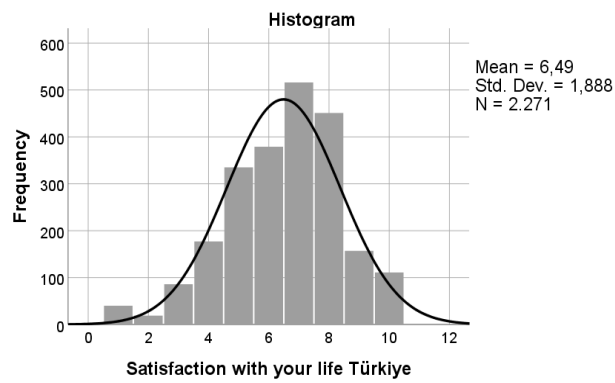
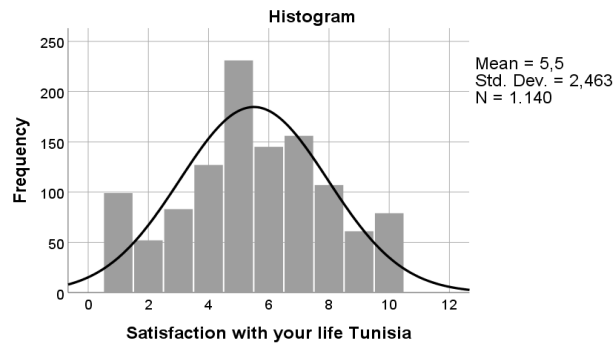
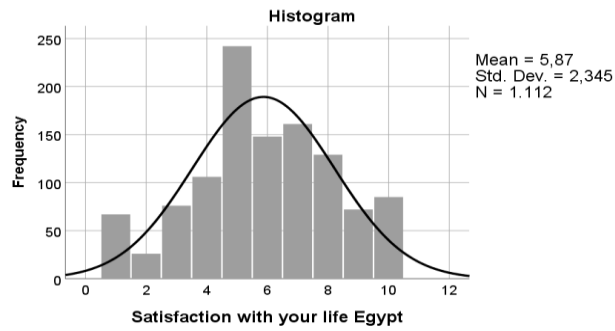
Logistic regression of life satisfaction in Egypt, Tunisia, and Türkiye Step1

	Egypt			Tunisia			Türkiye		
	Coeff.	S.E.	O.R.	Coeff.	S.E.	O.R.	Coeff.	S.E.	O.R.
Gender (ref. Female)	-.348	.201	.706	-.047	.163	.954	-.068	.111	.934
Age	.026	.007***	1.026	.002	.006	1.002	-.001	.005	.999
Scale of income	.515	.187**	1.673	.223	.122	1.250	.663	.098***	1.941
Education level	.214	.091*	1.239	.105	.105	1.111	-.023	.064	.977
Marital Status (ref. Married or living with partner)									
Never married	.085	.204	1.088	-.101	.192	.904	-.301	.125*	.740
Divorced or separated	-.074	.321	.929	-.001	.345	1.001	-.294	.287	.745
Widowed	-.005	.259	.995	.028	.292	1.028	-.304	.293	.738
Employment status (ref. Full time, part-time or self-employed)									
Student, homemaker or other	-.030	.208	.971	.276	.175	1.318	-.055	.123	.946
Unemployed	.150	.338	1.162	-.709	.290*	.492	-.125	.187	.883
Retired	.019	.342	1.020	.793	.290**	2.209	.400	.210	1.493
State of Health	.550	.090***	1.733	.775	.091***	2.171	.857	.070***	2.357
Feeling Secure	.289	.102**	1.336	.251	.094**	1.285	.337	.077***	1.401
Nagelkerke R square	.107			.165			.168		

Appendix

Figure A

Distribution of Life Satisfaction Variable (Original ten-point scale)



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Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors report there are no competing interests to declare.

Data Availability

Data is freely available and can be accessed through <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSDocumentationWV7.jsp>

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Cercetările privind sectorul voluntariatului examinează din ce în ce mai mult modul în care implicarea individuală în organizațiile neguvernamentale (ONG-uri) contribuie la bunăstarea subiectivă. În timp ce beneficiile sociale ale voluntariatului sunt bine documentate, potențialul său de a spori satisfacția cu viața la nivel individual rămâne mai puțin explorat în contextul Orientului Mijlociu. Acest studiu comparativ își propune să contribuie la acoperirea acestei lacune prin examinarea asocierii dintre apartenența activă la ONG-uri și satisfacția cu viața în Egipt, Tunisia și Turcia, folosind date din cel de-al șaptelea val al *World Values Survey* (WVS). Rezultatele regresiei logistice binomiale arată că apartenența activă la ONG-uri este asociată pozitiv cu satisfacția cu viața în toate cele trei țări.

Cuvinte-cheie: organizații de voluntariat; satisfacția cu viața; ONG-uri; Egipt; Tunisia; Turcia.

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