

Picture from: <http://bit.ly/lwpOF9>

## Is There an Untapped Pool of Volunteers for the Big Society? Not really...

(The dynamic approach to understanding patterns of activity in voluntary organisations and its implications for the Big Society policy )

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# The Big Society agenda



Picture from: <http://bit.ly/jSfGEd>

“You can call it liberalism.  
You can call it empowerment.  
You can call it freedom.  
You can call it responsibility.  
I call it **the Big Society**”

# The Big Society Agenda

- A shift in responsibility and decision making from the centralised government to individuals and community ‘the Big Society is about collective action and collective responsibility’ (Cabinet Office, 2011a).
- One of the main aims of it is make ‘as easy as possible for **civil society organisations** to help shape and deliver our public services, making it **easier to set up and run a civil society organisation** and to get more resources to the sector’ (Cabinet Office, 2011a).
- ‘Not [about] encouraging **volunteering** for the sake of it. This is about equipping people and organisations with the power and resources they need to make a real difference in their communities (Cabinet Office, 2011a).

# The levels of activity in voluntary organisations

- **Concerns about the levels of activity being not big enough:**
  - Compared to the rest of Europe British devote less hours to volunteering (*Giving Green Paper*)
  - Only 44% involved in voluntary associations and only 12% volunteered to get involved in local politics or community affairs (*Pattie&Johnson, 2011*)
- **Big Society Policy Programme aims to ‘...take a range of measures to encourage volunteering and involvement in social action...’ particularly among young people and those living in deprived areas** (Cabinet Office, 2011b),

# This study

- **Main argument:** to develop effective policies for increasing the levels of activity in voluntary organisations in Britain (and other countries) – it is important to examine not only cross-sectional rates of activity but also the individual longitudinal dynamics of activity behind these rates.
- **Aim:** to demonstrate how the application of the dynamic approach to an analysis of activity in voluntary organisations can uncover the complexity of the activity patterns of individuals that lie behind the cross-sectional rates of activity and which consequently provides more detailed information could inform better policy decisions.
- **Objectives:**
  - To apply dynamic approach to examine the longitudinal patterns of activity that lie behind the cross-sectional rates of activity in voluntary organisations
  - To analyse socio-economic differences in the dynamics of that activity
  - To assess the implications of the activity dynamics of socio-economic differences in them for policy development initiatives such as the Big Society agenda.

# Static vs dynamic approach to measuring volunteering

- **Life course** : ‘a sequence of socially defined events and roles that the individual enacts over time’ (Giele and Elder 1998, p. 22).
- **Changes in roles, statuses and resources thorough the life course related to changes in individuals’ volunteering status.** For example:
  - becoming married increases men’s likelihood of joining a voluntary association and reduces the likelihood of both men and women stopping their membership (Rotolo, 2000)
  - that older people are more likely to stop volunteering after they have become widowed (Butrica et al., 2009)
  - retiring or stopping to work increases the likelihood of volunteering among older individuals (Mutchler, 2003).
  - moving from full-time work to part-time working increases the likelihood of stopping activity in instrumental (political, environmental and voluntary service) associations (Kamerāde, 2009).
  - Older individuals whose health improves are less likely to stop volunteering (Butrica et al 2009). If their health declines, they are more likely to stop volunteering and less likely to start it (Kohli et al., 2009)

# “Hypotheses”:

1. A person’s involvement in voluntary associations is a dynamic process and that many individuals repeatedly move into and out of voluntary associations
2. The differences in the cross-sectional rates of volunteering across various socio-demographic groups can be a result of the different longitudinal volunteering patterns, not only of being less likely to join voluntary associations in general

# Data

- British Household Panel Survey
- A sample of 3,983 individuals, who were at least 16 years old in 1991 and who provided responses to the voluntary affiliation questions in all waves between 1991 and 2007.
- The average age =41 (*SD* 18) in 1991
- 55% of the participants were women.
- The sample used in this paper represents 39% of the initial sample of 10,264 individuals in 1991.
- the BHPS wave 2007 longitudinal respondent weights used to reduce the bias due to sample attrition and adjust for initial selection probabilities and attrition.



# Measurements

- **Activity in voluntary organisations:** “Do you join in the activities of any of these organisations on a regular basis?” (a list of voluntary groups -political party, trade union, environmental group, parents’ association, tenants or residents group, religious group, voluntary service group, other community group, social group, sports club, women’s institute, women’s group, and other voluntary organisations). Binary variable: yes/no
- **Age** (measured using the birth year)
- **Individual income per year** - the total annual income in £ that an individual has received from different sources in a particular year.
- **Social class** ( based on Goldthorpe, 1987) This class scheme classifies all individuals into six social classes based on their current occupation (or last occupation for the unemployed):
  - Semi or unskilled manual workers, including agricultural labourers
  - Skilled manual working class
  - Foreman and technicians
  - Petty bourgeoisie: self-employed workers with or without employees
  - Routine non-manual employees
  - Service class: professionals, administrators and managers.
- **Control variables:** gender, presence of children under 12 in household, changes in marital status.

**Figure 1. Cross-sectional rates of activity  
in voluntary associations (1991-2007)**

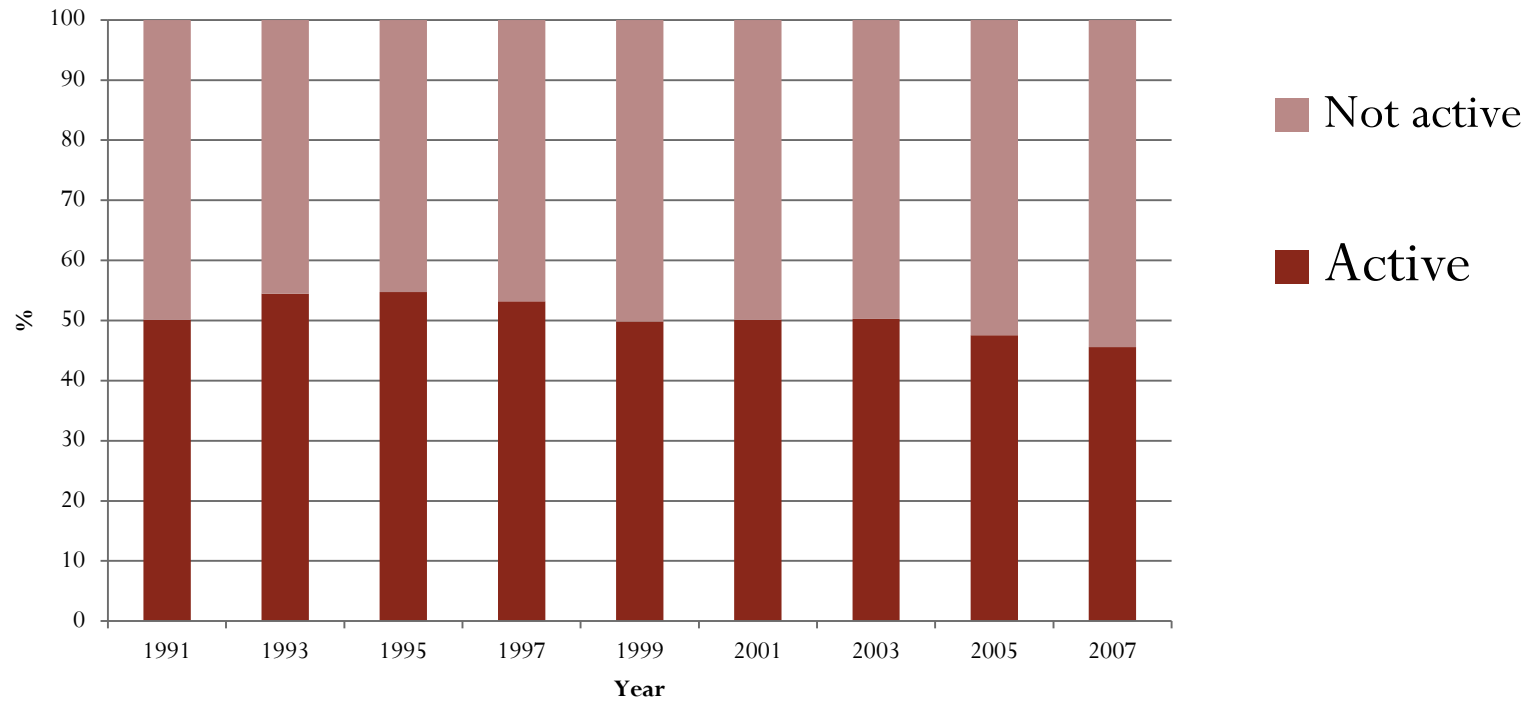
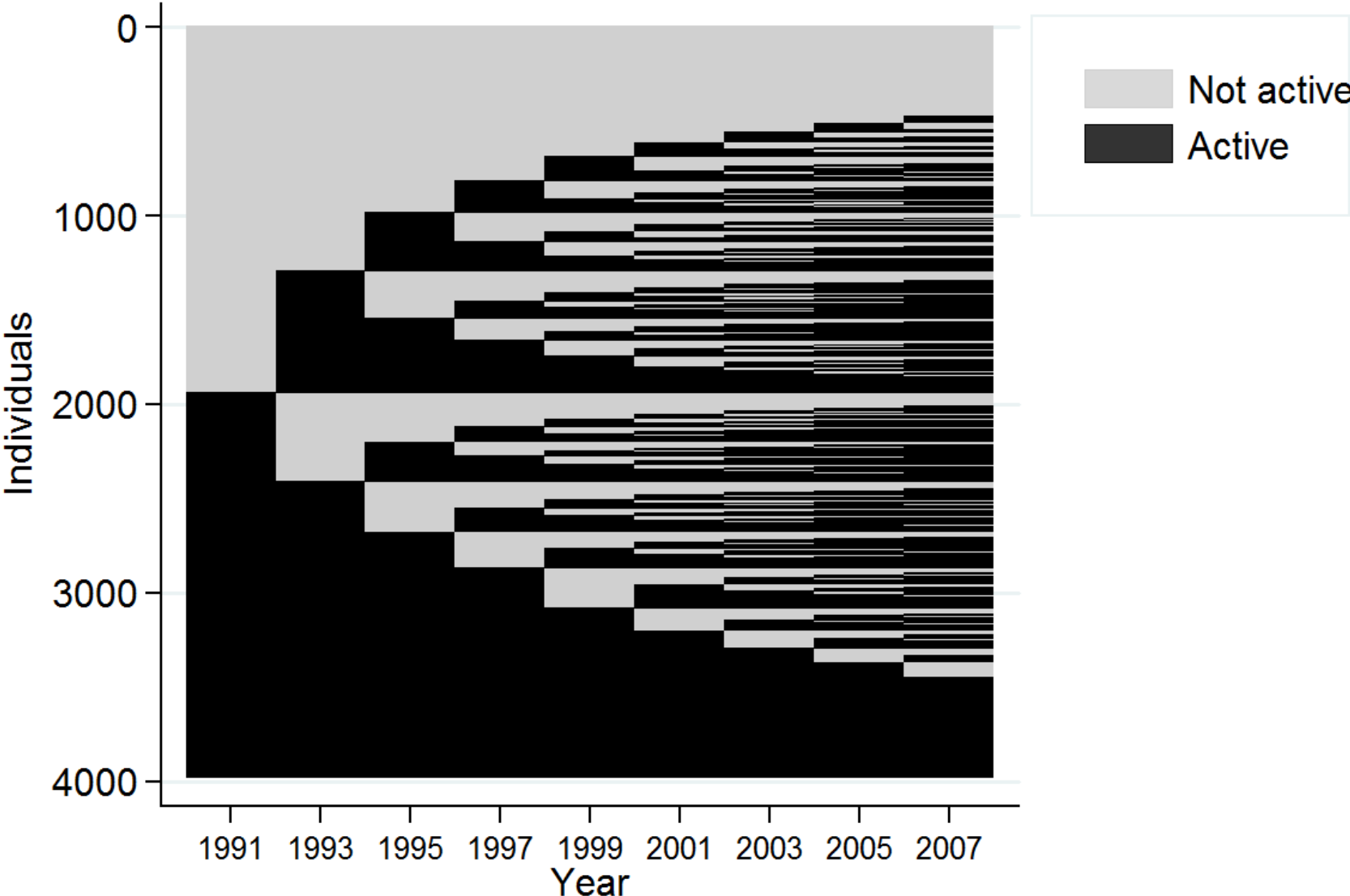


Figure 2. Individual histories of activity in voluntary associations (1991-2007)



**Figure 4. Types of volunteering histories 1991-2007**

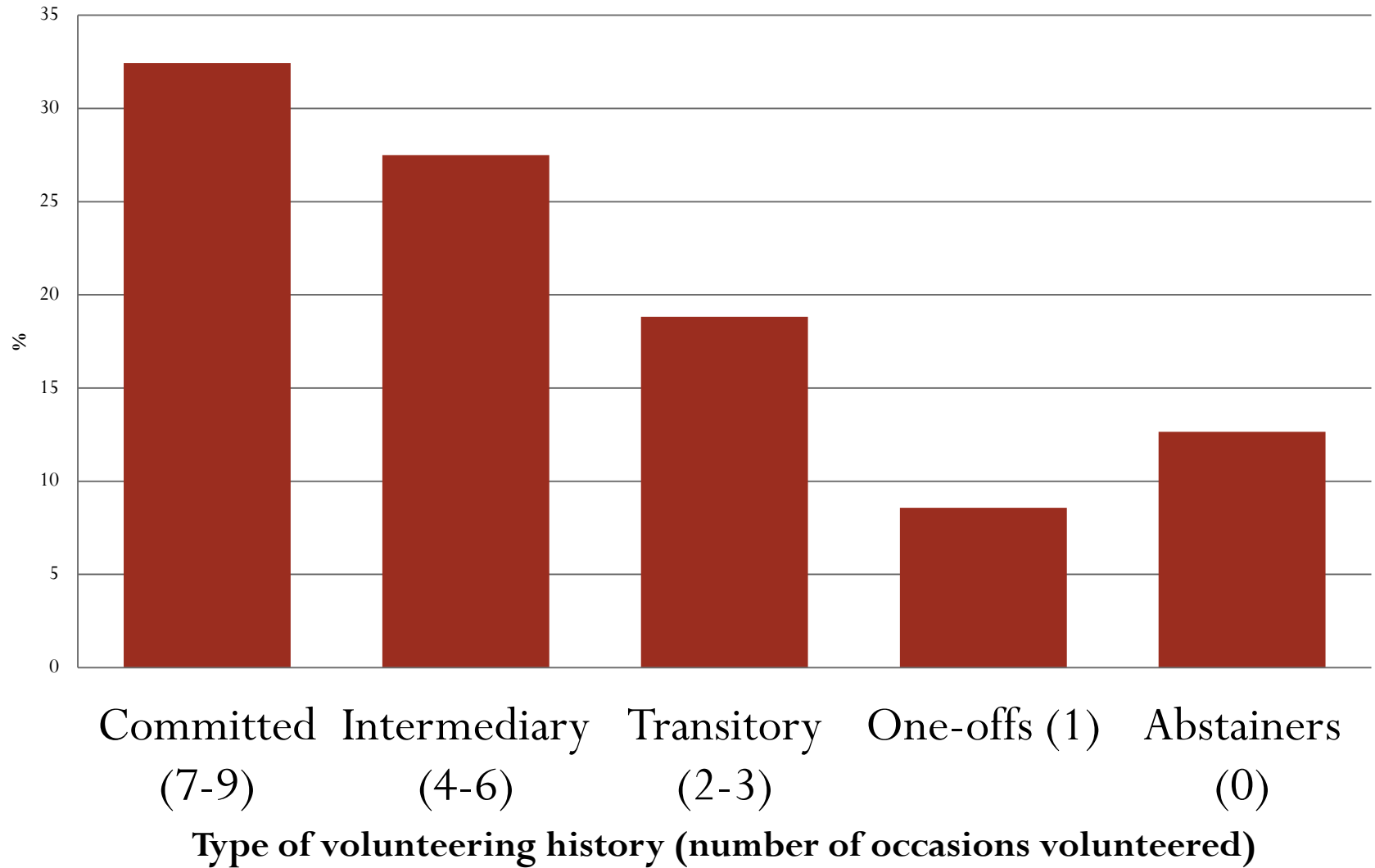
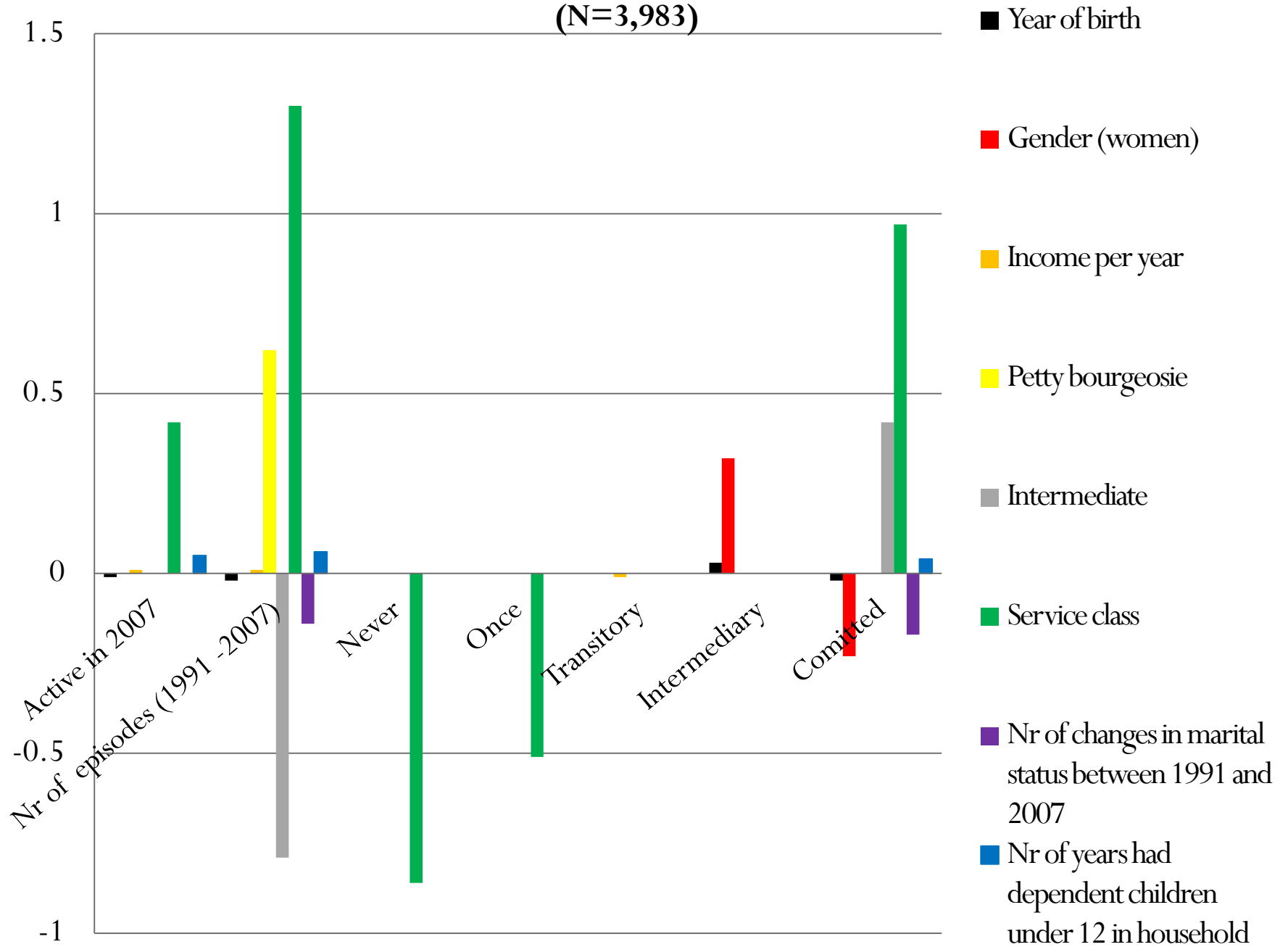


Figure 5. Socio-economic characteristics and activity dynamics

(N=3,983)



# Conclusions

- A person's activity in voluntary organisations is a dynamic process and that many individuals repeatedly move into and out of voluntary organisations, therefore there are more types of activism than just 'active' vs 'not active'
- The differences in cross-sectional rates of activity across various socio-economic groups can be a result of the different longitudinal activity patterns. The knowledge of these differences can help to develop more targeted policies

# Policy implications

- To increase the levels of **activity in general**, the Big Society agenda should focus on retaining and re-engaging people who are already active but do not engage in this activity continuously.
- To increase the levels of activity **among younger people**, the Big Society agenda should focus on retention of young individuals who are already active in voluntary organisations
- To increase the levels of activity **among un-/semiskilled workers**, the focus should be on recruitment and retention, especially on retention of those who join organisations for the first time.