Advocacy groups, social movements and social capital

DPI-415

Key issues

I. What is Putnam’s theory of the role of associations in strengthening social capital?
II. What is the US evidence
III. What are the worldwide patterns?
IV. What are the implications?

Readings

Caramani Ch 14 (Werner and Wilsoni) and Ch 16 (Kriesi)
Newton and van Deth Ch 9
World bank Social Capital for Development

Putnam’s work

Making Democracy Work (1993) - Italy
“Bowling Alone” 1995 Jnl of Democracy
The strange disappearance of civic America (online)
“Tuning In & Tuning Out” 1996 PS
Disaffected Democracies (2000)
Bowling Alone (2000)
Democracies in Flux (2002)
Amazing Grace (forthcoming)

Putnam’s concept of Social Capital

“Features of social life - networks, norms, and trust - that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared objectives.”
Capacity building

Components of social capital

Social Capital

- Generalized reciprocity
- Social tolerance
- Formal memberships
- Informal social networks
Theoretical claims

1) Social capital has significant consequences for societal cooperation, coordination and collaboration
2) Social capital has significant consequences for democratic governance
3) Social capital explains variations in performance if Italian regional government
4) Social capital has declined in postwar America (and elsewhere?)

Theoretical framework

Why might social networks and social trust relate to good governance?

Social trust → Civic engagement → Accountable representative democracy → Better policy outputs?

Social networks

2. Evidence in United States?

Putnam’s Bowling Alone

Aggregate trends in declining

- Social trust
- Civic engagement
- Voting turnout
- Associational membership
- Unions, PTA
- Trust in government

Why? So what?

Declining social trust, US

Note: Q. “Do you think that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” Is agreeing “Most people can be trusted” a trend?
Putnam concludes:

"By virtually every conceivable measure, social capital has eroded steadily and sometimes dramatically over the past two generations."  
*Bowling Alone* P.287.

Index of US social capital

- Measures in each state
  - % who
    - Served on committee of local organization
    - Served as officer for club/organ last year
    - Civic & social organizations per 1000 pop
    - Attended club meetings last year
    - Turnout in presidential elections
    - Attended town meeting last year
    - Did volunteer work last year
    - Worked on community project last year
    - Spent a lot of time visiting friends
    - Entertained at home last year
    - Agree 'most people can be trusted'
    - Agree 'most people are honest'

Consequences

- Education & children's welfare
- Safe and productive neighborhoods
- Economic prosperity
- Greater health and happiness
- Better governance eg tax evasion rates
- Negative impacts? Tolerance?

Critiques of measures and evidence?
Critique?

1. Measures dated and limited?
2. New forms of association
   1. Social movements eg anti-globalization
   2. Internet communication & activism
3. Old organizations exclusionary?
   1. Race and gender
4. Nostalgic normative assumptions?
5. Problems of disentangling causality
   1. Healthy, happy, safe societies generate stronger social linkages?
6. Misdiagnosis of causes?

Explanation for any erosion?

Why decline in US civic engagement?

- Decline of long ‘civic’ generation – interwar and postwar
- Time pressure
- Economic hard times
- Residential mobility
- Suburbanization
- Movement of women into paid workforce
- Disruption marriage/family
- Changes in US economy
- 1960s incl. Vietnam/watergate/cultural revolt
- Growth of welfare state
- Civil rights revolution
- Television & technology

Additional factors

- Social diversity
- Racial divisions in the US
- Social inequality
- Mobilizing organizations
- Role of churches

Role of TV

- TV to blame for post-civic generation
- Why?
  - Time- displacement
  - Heavy TV watching may induce passivity/malaise/mistrust
  - Effects on children

Critique: Does TV erode social capital? Norris

- Matters what you watch as much as how much you watch it
  - Evidence American Citizen Participation, Study 1990
  - More hours of TV watching = less participation (with controls)
  - But more hours of watching TV news and current affairs = more participation
  - Chicken & egg problem of causal arrow
**Putnam Ed. Democracies in Flux**

The evolution of social capital in contemporary society 2002
Oxford University Press

Full text chapters available at http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/

**Democracies in Flux**

**Compares 8 OECD nations**
- US, Britain, Germany, France, Spain, Sweden, Australia, Japan
- Similar trends (eg TV, work, leisure) in similar societies?

**Concludes: ”Our investigation has found no general and simultaneous decline in social capital throughout the industrial/postindustrial world over the last generation.” p.410**

**Key challenges: Putnam 2005**

- What has happened to civic engagement and social capital in America over the last 30 to 40 years?
- Why the decline?
  - I now think that my analysis overlooked three important factors: the growth of inequality, the growth of diversity, and the decay of mobilizing organizations.
- Does it matter?
- What can we do about it?
  - The weakest part of my argument was the paucity of solutions, and it remains as despite the creative insights of many people and my own efforts, as exemplified in the book “Better Together.” That our democracy seems even less healthy today than it was a decade ago suggests that my diagnosis was right — and that practical ideas for reviving American civic life are needed more urgently than ever.

**Figures**

1. **Figure 1**
   - How many hours of TV watched

2. **Figure 2**
   - How often watch current affairs programs

**Conclusions:**

1. Expansion in educated middle class, rising individualism, spread of mass entertainment common in many industrialized societies
2. Yet major differences in civil society due to the role of state and corporatist traditions, and the impact of wars
3. "Social capital is conditioned by political developments as much as the reverse.” p.411
4. Some common trends - falling participation in elections, parties, unions and churches.
5. Offset at least in part by increases in informal, fluid, personal forms of social connection “loose connections” eg sports and leisure groups
6. Impact on quality of connections on social
**Index of Social Capital**

- **Data:** World Values Study, mid-1990s
- **Measures of associational networks + cultural norms**
- **Associational membership**
  - Voluntary organizations
    - eg Active, inactive or not a member of a union, party, sports club, environmental organization etc.
  - Three alternative measures: Vol-any, vol-org, vol-act
- **Social trust**
  - “Generally speaking would you say that most people can be trusted or you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?”
- **Social capital = vol-act*social trust**

**Social capital in EES-15, 2002**

Note: The mean level of membership in 12 types of voluntary association and the mean scores on the Social Trust scale by nation.

Source: European Social Survey 2002 Weighted by dweight.

Next class: 5 April on Political Culture (and Report 2)