Civic engagement and trust in Britain 2003-2004

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Abstract

The effect of civic engagement on generalised trust or social capital is endogeneous due to unobserved heterogeneity driving both engament and trust. Nurture and values lie at the core of this heterogeneity. Nurturing environment with parental examples about trust and values of control and optimism capture most determinants of trust so that, controlling for nurture and values, civic engagement should be independent of trust. I examine the contributions of nurture, values, civic engagement, and unobserved heterogenity in explaining trust. Endogeneous treatment model is applied with an overdispersed Poisson extension because civic engagement is a count (not binary) variable. British Cultural Capital and Social Exclusion survey data (N=1,829) demonstrate that the Tocquevellian claim still stands. Civic engagement leads to trust, over and above unobserved heterogeneity and observed nurture plus values. However, in British society, social class of upbringing trumps nearly all these causes.

Keywords: endogeneous treatment model, civic engagement, trust, social capital

1 Introduction

Social capital, understood as "networks, norms and trust" to use Putnam's lean definition, is often seen as a solution to collective action problem (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Brehm and Rahn, 1997; Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000; Fountain, 1998). This is despite heavy criticisms levelled at the concept of social capital. Woolcock (2010) assesses the literature over the past two decades and his title sums up the current state of the literature "The rise and routinization of social capital." The role as solution lies at the heart of many instances where the efficacy of social capital is routinely documented. In the domain of politics, Putnam's works have been influential. In the domain of development, the World Bank researchers have documented many country studies (Dasgupta and Serageldin, 2000) and have even prompted an instance of soul-searching amongst these consummate policy advisors (Bebbington et al., 2006). In the domain of public health, Kawachi and Berkman (2003) and Marmot et al. (2010) present mechanisms involving social capital and document its effects on a wide range of health outcomes. In the domain of business management, works collected in Lane and Bachmann (1998) discuss trust and its relationship with business performance. These domains are just an idiosyncratic sample.

A concern is often raised since despite this overwhelming evidence of its consequences, relatively less is understood about the causes or the creation of social capital. If it is so desirable, what can be done to create and maintain the level of social capital? The role of government and public policy are clearly important; see Cohen (1999); Hall (1999) on the U.S. and U.K. re-

spectively. In the pages of this journal, Schneider et al. (1997) suggest that the institutional arrangement of public school, particularly school choice, enables the creation of social capital.

The most illustrious cause is perhaps claimed by de Tocqueville: civic associations lead to social capital. Alexis de Tocqueville, as is well known, put the vibrant civic associations at the heart of American democracy, hence the perspective can be called 'school for democracy' perspective. As he puts it in de Tocqueville (1863, :132)

> Feelings and opinions are recruited, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed, only by the reciprocal influence of men [sic] upon each other ... These influences must therefore be artificially created, and this can only be accomplished by associations.

Earlier in the writing he refers specifically to "those associations only which are formed in civil life, without reference to political object" (:129). Putnam draws upon this and emphasises that *generalised reciprocity is a community asset* (Putnam, 2000, :136, original emphasis). It is a short step from this community asset to generalised trust or social capital as is now often understood. In the passage, Putnam writes that trust in the generalised other, "rests implicitly on some background of shared expectations of reciprocity". This claim is the source of much of empirical works which purported to test whether civic associations lead to social capital. Stolle and Hooghe (2004, :424) write for instance that "interaction within any kind of context, whether formal or informal, can exert ... feelings of tolerance,

generalized trust and norms of reciprocity." Although Putnam is quick to remark, in fact in the same spread, that engagement in civic associations and trust are likely to form a virtuous cycle, this Tocquevellian perspective, i.e. associations as school for democracy, if often the starting point in empirical analysis on civic engagement and social capital e.g. (Brehm and Rahn, 1997).

The aim of this paper is to revisit the connection between civic engagement and trust because Tocqueville's claim is far from being established. Critics claim civic engagement to be independent of trust once the nurturing environment and the values or outlook about life are accounted for (Uslaner, 1999, 2002). Values such as control and optimism are stable beyond the nurturing stage in life, and so is trust. They are not amenable to life experiences during adulthood and certainly independent of civic engagement. Trust ('most people can be trusted') as a value or a view about the world has a moral character; in short, a moral good to be shared within a moral community (Uslaner, 2002). Trust circulates within the moral community in the form of 'benefit of the doubt' conceded to and received from general others. For Uslaner, the boundaries of an adult moral communities are resistant to redrawing by life experiences, certainly resistant to enlarging by civic engagement. Uslaner (2002, :12, emphasis in original) writes,

> trust reflects an optimistic view of the world and the belief that you can control your own fate. And trust does *not* generally depend upon your life experiences, including your wealth, your marital status, and a variety of other factors.

These are the highlights of the results: sense of control has one of the largest effects on trust while nurturing environment and optimism have no effect. As de Tocqueville claims, civic engagement leads to social capital, even after controlling for these and unobserved heterogeneity. Most remarkably, however, social class of upbringing has an effect comparable to that of sense of control. Although social class is well known as a major division in British society, I am not aware of any comparable empirical demonstration. Social class of upbringing should be included in the conception of nurture in empirical research on the causes of trust.

2 Creating trust: nurture, values and civic engagement

Social capital as "networks, norms, and trust" has been shown to be important for a democratic and healthy society (Putnam, 1993, 2000; Berkman and Kawachi, 2000). Putnam, following de Tocqueville, highlights the role of participation in voluntary associations in creating generalised trust in citizens. For him, voluntary associations, though 'without reference to political object', are arenas where people are enabled to sow and tend the seeds of generalised trust. Such associations instill in their members or volunteers trust in people beyond their limited groups. In turn, trust is essential in civic and political life. People with generalised trust or those who trust other people in general are more likely to vote in democratic election or to write to their local representative in efforts to improve local civic life. By engaging in voluntary associations, trust are created which in turn is instru-

mental for political life beyond the associations. Following the majority of this literature, I refrain from discussing the expressive aspect of voluntary activities.

The effect of voluntary associations on trust, though well-known, is not without its critics. Uslaner for instance argues that certain kind of people are predisposed to be both active volunteer and generally trusting (Uslaner, 1999, 2002, 2004b,a). Such positive predisposition manifests in a positive effect of voluntary association on trust. But this does not mean that voluntary associations necessarily lead to generalised trust. Voluntary associations do not create nor maintain social capital. In fact, Uslaner argues the opposite: trusting people tend to be engaged in more voluntary associations. Both Putnam and Uslaner can be right of course. We are probably looking at a virtuous cycle between civic engagement and trust (Brehm and Rahn, 1997).

Uslaner also claims that trust, as a moral resource, is primarily the product of nurture. "Children develop trust in others by learning from – and emulating– their parents" (Uslaner, 2004b, :240). In another place he writes, "your trust depends upon how much your parents trusted others and, more generally, how nurturing your home environment was" (Uslaner, 2002, :77). Generalised trust is instilled during childhood. Nurture is the key that started the engine of the virtuous cycle of voluntary engagement and trust.

2.1 Civic engagement: not a school for democracy?

The Tocquevellian perspective that civic associations are "school for democracy" is one of the major attractions of social capital theory. Putnam is credited to bring this notion to prominence in public discourse although he

is more nuanced in his expositions. In his influential work, Bowling Alone [:137], he writes,

> The causal arrows among civic involvement, reciprocity, honesty, and social trust [generalised trust] are as tangeled as well-tossed spaghetti. Only careful, even experimental, research will be able to sort them apart definitely. For present purposes, however, we need to recognize that they form a coherent syndrome.

This nuanced however has not prevented the majority of empirical works on the relation between civic engagement and generalised trust to adopt the school for democracy perspective as the hypthesis: civic engagements lead to generalised trust. Stolle and Hooghe (2004) elaborate that there is "a spill-over effect from one's membership in organizations to the development of cooperative values." This effect need not arise solely from formal organisation but also from informal engagement. Engagements in civic activities elicit generalised trust from its participants.

But a problem is often noted with the perspective: even if members (compared to non-members) tend to trust more generally, they may constitute a self-selecting group. Such group are made up of people who are both keener to join and more trusting. The relation between civic engagement and generalised trust suffers from endogeneity. Critics often attribute the lack of robust evidence for the school of democracy perspective to this endogeneity problem. Such failure could be easier to explain in terms of socialisation perspective that is often proposed to enrich social capital investigations. For adults, regular civic engagements tend to be short-lived

and more importantly happen at the stage in life when values and norms (including generalised trust) are already well-formed. Experiences gained in civic associations therefore tend to be ineffective in shaping values such as generalised trust. Values, that are systematically related to both engagement and trust, are relatively constant for adults since these were formed during childhood and adolescence. This stability is also emphasised by Uslaner who lists optimism and control as two prime examples of stable values which are related to both engagement and generalised trust.

Uslaner, in many places, notes another problem with the school for democracy perspective: people tend to associate with similar people. Like-minded, and often demographically similar, people are involved together in pursuit of common goal. If the central idea distinguishing generalised trust from other kinds of trust is how inclusive the moral community is, then it follows that engagement with similar kinds of people is unlikely to engender generalised trust. Moral community is where moral resources such as trust and benefits of the doubts are shared and circulated. Generalised trust, often cited with a phrase like 'most people can be trusted', by definition extends to strangers, spills over to people unlike the members. This leads Uslaner to suggest the opposite view: generalised trust leads to civic engagements. To bring in the point of socialisation emphasised by Stolle and Hooghe, by the time socialisation congeal, certain values and attitudes including generalised trust are already formed. In turn, generalised trust leads people to get involved in various civic and other activities.

Brehm and Rahn (1997) in their attempt to bolster the case for social capital as a solution to the collective action problem, examined the recip-

rocal relationships between civic engagement, social capital and confidence in government at the individual level. Inspired by the account in Putnam (1993), they pool data from the U.S. General Social Survey 1972-1994 and use membership in a range of civic and political organizations to derive level of civic engagement. They also use a set of indicators of trust to derive level of generalised trust. They find that both civic engagement and generalised trust are mutually reinforcing; positive and significant coefficients are reported for both equations. These relationships, however, are noted for their asymmetry where the effect of civic engagement on interpersonal trust is one of the strongest.

Also in this journal, Schneider et al. (1997) using data from New York and New Jersey in 1995 suggest that school choice by parents creates social capital as measured by e.g. parents' trust in teachers. To address the possibility that school choice is endogeneous, the authors use a two-step estimation where school choice estimation is followed by social capital estimation. Prediction from the first estimation is included in the second. Freedman (2005, :185-189) ciriticises their work in details, in particular claiming that the two-steps were not adequate to deal with endogeneity. He suggests instead a simultaneous estimation of the endogeneus (social choice) and main (social capital) equations with unobserved or latent heterogeneity. The presence of unobserved heterogeneity is consistent with the substantive criticisms above where optimism and control (often unobserved or not collected in surveys) lie at the heart of the unobserved heterogeneity. This is attempted in this study.

Although explorations about the processes initiated during childhood that leads to such desirable impetus for the virtuous cycle are only beginning, an example is given (Uslaner, 1999). Sport involvement by parents is a potentially positive mechanism. Not only sports, especially team sport, expose children to other people, sports also instill in participants at least three values. Participants (versus mere spectators) gained the most. Although spectator sport is a known phrase, spectating does not convey the same amount of benefit as actually participating. Next, participants adhere to externally imposed yet internally accepted common rules. The majority of formal and informal civic associations generally function better with commonly accepted rule. Lastly, win or lose is the name of the game in sport. This is probably not too far from the fact of life in purposeful civic associations and this is certainly the fact in democratic life where a party can win or lose the vote or confidence of its constituency.

3 The Cultural capital and social exclusion survey

The data come from the Cultural capital and social exclusion (CCSE) survey funded by the U.K. Economic and Social Research Council. The data have been deposited with the Economic and Social Data Services. The survey was carried out by the U.K. National Centre for Social Research using stratified random sample designed to be representative of adults aged 18 or over living in private households in Englan, Wales and Scotland. The sample (1829 respondents) was drawn from the Small Users Postcode Address File (including ethnic minority boost sample of 265 respondents). The field

work was conducted from November 2003 to March 2004. The response rate was a disappointing 47% though low responses are not exceptional in social surveys. The technical report of the survey (Thomson, 2004) highlight that it was difficult to motivate the respondents to take part. The broad and somewhat unusual topics may have been a factor. Certainly, deep survey of cultural capital has been rarely done in British society for quite a while until then. More details are available in the technical report. The sample includes a boost minority subsample and this subsample is indicated with *Boost* variable below.

The dependent variable is *Trust* (generalised trust) elicited with: "Would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?" The ordered categories are: most people can be trusted, depends, cannot be too careful. The main covariate (*Civic engagement*) is the sum of memberships and activities in voluntary organisations. These were elicited with: "Are you currently a member of any of the organisations on this card?" And "Whether you are a member or not, do you join in the activities of any of these organisations on a regular basis?" The list of organisations include political party, trade union, environmental group, parents' or school association, tenants' or residents' group or neighbourhood watch, religious group or church organisation, voluntary services group, professional organisation or chamber of commerce, national or ethnic community organisation, social club or working men's club, sports club, women's group, amateur music or drama group, film society, fan club, arts or heritage organisation and other groups not listed.

Following the motivations to account for nurture, otimism and control

(Uslaner, 1999, :146) or (Uslaner, 2002, chapter 4;194), they are all included in this study. Measure of nurture was derived from whether parents' hobbies includes the arts and sports. These were elicited with: "Thinking back now to the hobbies, pastimes and interests that your parents (father/mother) had when you were growing up, which if any of these were your parents (father/mother) interested in?" From the list sports was picked. Two measures of control and optimism are used and they were elicited with statements about 'the way [respondent] feel'. First, "What happens to me is my own doing." Second, "Here is a list of things that are sometimes said to be important in helping people to get a good job and achieve career success. Please say which are the three most important." Four of these are taken from the list: natural ability, education/hardwork, ambition and good health. These are left out: luck, born into a wealthy family, having good social connection, being a man, being white, having been to a private school, social skills, good looks, appearances, having the right accent, and others. Parents' social class, and respondents', are alo included to reflect the well known distinction in British society (Goldthorpe, 1987; Marshall et al., 1988; Butler and Savage, 1995; Devine, 2004). Social classes (manual as reference, intermediate and professional) of respondents and parents follow the official National Statistics Socio-economic Classification (Rose and Pevalin, 2003). Other sociodemographic covariates are standard as used by Uslaner, Putnam, Brehm and Rahn among others. These include *Female*, *Age*, *Education* (A Level or more, equivalent to post-secondary college), *Married*, *Separated* and *Income*.

4 Endogeneous treatment model

Often in cross-section survey, such as the CCSE survey used here, measures of nurture and moral values (including optimism or control) are not available. Yet this drives civic engagement(the right hand side), and trust or social capital (the left hand side). Civic engagement is therefore endogeneous to social capital. I therefore use an endogeneous treatment model.The model is as follows.

$$
\begin{aligned}
y* &= \mu_1 X_1 + \lambda\eta + \varepsilon_1 && (1)\\
y &= \begin{cases} -1 & \text{if } -\infty < y* \leq \kappa_1; \\ 0 & \text{if } \kappa_1 < y* \leq \kappa_2; \\ 1 & \text{if } \kappa_2 < y* \leq \infty \end{cases} && (2)\\
\Pr(\mathrm{c}, \mu_2) &= \frac{\mu_2^{\mathrm{c}} \exp(-\mu_2)}{\mathrm{c}!} && (3)\\
\log(\mu_2) &= \beta X_2' + 1\eta + \zeta && (4)
\end{aligned}
$$

where y: generalised trust; c: civic engagement; X: observed exogeneous covariates which include social class, gender, income, marital status, age, nurture (sport), control and optimism; η: remaining unobserved heterogeneity; ν: neighbourhood variance; and ε: residual variance.

Exclusion restrictions Parents' social class is included in the equation on generalised trust since social class of upbringing reflects nurture (see Devine (2004) on most recent demonstration). Social class of upbringing

(parents' social class) is excluded from the civic engagement equation since the respondents' social class is deemed more important. If there were any parents' social class influence on engagement, they are assumed to be operative through respondents' social class. The vast literature on intergenerational social mobility in Britain has demonstrated the effect of parents' social class on current social class (Halsey et al., 1980; Goldthorpe, 1987; Marshall et al., 1988; Butler and Savage, 1995).

Income is included in the equation on civic engagements since these activities often require material resources. These are assumed to be independent of generalised trust because, first, trust is taken to be stable during adulthood and, second, all the major causes (nurture, values, engagement) have been included in the trust equation (Uslaner, 2002, :12). The time spent watching TV is include in the equation on civic engagement since this has been implicated in the decline of civic engagement (Uslaner, 1999; Putnam, 2000).

5 Result

Sample description is given in Table 1 where it shows nearly a third trust in generalised other. The sample is slightly unbalanced in gender composition. Respondents were members of about two organisations, two in five had parents with sport as a hobby, nearly four in five have a sense of control and they pick on average two out of four optimism indicators.

The main results are presented in Table 2 where pooled sample is used in one model and boost sample indicated in another model. Nearly all coef-

Table 1: Cultural capital and social exclusion survey, $N = 1829$

Variable	Mean/pct	Std. deviation
Trust: most people can be trusted		
Cannot, depends, most can	64, 5, 31	
Female	55	
Civic engagement	1.7	1.9
Nurture: sport	40	
Control	78	
Optimism	2	
TV hours	7.5	
Age	47	
Education	A-level (college)	
Married/cohab	52	
Separated	25	
Single	23	
Income group	£15-20K	
Social class		
Manual	49	
Intermed	19	
Professional/managerial	32	
Parents' class		
Manual	59	
Intermed	16	
Professional/managerial	25	

ficients are comparable when the boost sample was included in the pool or when the boost sample was indicated (both top panels). This comparability is encouraging because the ethnic minority maybe have been different.

The focal result is the effect of civic engagement on trust which is positive and significant (0.04). The magnitude is small though all major causes identified in the literature above are already controlled for. These include nurture (insignificant), parents' social class (much larger at 0.17 for some and significant), sense of control (much larger at 0.18 and significant) and

optimism (insignificant). Two notable findings confirm the widely shared views about cleavages in British society. Education and social class are significant where those with A-level certificate (or post secondary college) tend to be more trusting and the professionals and managers are likewise. Social class of their parents, partly reflecting their nurturing environment when growing up, has one of the the largest effects. In short all the major causes of generalised trust are evident: nurture, values, and civic engagement.

The bottom panels present models for civic engagement, again for pooled sample and for sample where the minority boost are indicated. Social class and education are again important (the largest and significant). Income and TV watching are important in opposite ways: one enabling, the other inhibiting. Marital status is not important in explaining both civic engagement and generalised trust.

The results also provide the coefficient of the remaining unobserved heterogeneity which drives both civic engagement and trust (0.13). This however is not at all precisely estimated. Given the fact that all the major causes have been found to be significant, there is probably little left that can be attributed to residual unobserved heterogenity.

6 Discussion and conclusion

Revisiting the debate about the creation of social capital is apposite given the recognition about the influence and routinization of the concept (Woolcock, 2010). The data source used here is unique in its provision of all the major causes of social capital or generalised trust including nurture and val-

ues in addition to civic engagement. The main focus since de Tocqueville's perceptive observations about American democracy has been on the beneficial role of engagements in civic associations. Said associations need not have 'political object' and can be about all and sundry.

The debate on the effect of civic engagement on social capital has produced much illumination and no less heat. We are now led to accept that social capital is materially created by government actions (Cohen, 1999; Hall, 1999). Schneider et al. (1997) suggest that institutional set up enabling individual choices can create social capital. Their results suffer from the endogeneity problem as discussed extensively by Freedman (2005). Applying endogeneous treatment effect here, I recover the positive effect of civic engagements in Britain.

The Tocquevellian perspective updated for the 21^{st} century remains powerful. The effect of multiple civic engagements stands over and above positive value creation through parental example (sport) and values of control and optimism as well as unobserved heterogeneity. However, transport into the 21^{st} century Britain must face the well known social class inequality. In fact, this remains one of the major cleavages in explaining social capital distribution.

The elements of nurture which instill the valuable generalised trust in children must also include apects that constitute family social class. This family social class has broader or moral significance and resonates with the writings of Uslaner (2002) and Sayer (2005). Because trust is a moral resource which is conceded and received within our moral communities, it is not surprising that the experience of class upbringing and class relations

shape the creation of this moral resource. For Uslaner, the boundaries of our moral communities to whose members we give our benefit of the doubt, are not subject to redrawing in adulthood. This study not only demonstrates that redrawing through civic engagement is possible, it also recognises that social class has moral significance. The findings are consistent with the claim that this moral resource is conditioned by the social class upbringing. Sayer (2005, :1) writes, "social class matters not only because of differences in access to material wealth but also because it affects our access to ... relationships which we have reason to value." He argues that condescension (versus respect), deference (versus reference), mistrust (versus trust) typify relations between people of different classes. While "some people may be respectful to individuals from other classes, the inequality themselves are likely to frustrate their attempts." Different classes of upbringing may instill or nurture different reasons to value trust or mistrust in generalised others. Social class of upbringing is part of nurture that creates generalised trust.

The affirmative answer to the question on the effect of civic engagement on social capital must thus be tempered by the persistence of class gradient in civic engagement. One may counter by saying: if the class gradient is ultimately reflected in increased trust, surely this is a good thing overall. This may be a good thing given the benefit to general others, it is all the more important to encourage civic engagement especially by harnessing the technologies of the 21^{st} century.

Table 2: Civic engagement and trust, Britain 2003-2004

	Including boost			Boost indicator		
term	coef	s.e.	p	coef	s.e.	p
		Trust				
Female	-0.1815	0.0567	0.001	-0.1842	0.0567	0.001
Age	0.0162	0.0098	0.100	0.0153	0.0099	0.120
Age^2	-0.0001	0.0001	0.280	-0.0001	0.0001	0.300
Educ (college)	0.0461	0.0257	0.072	0.0488	0.0258	0.058
Intermed class	0.0769	0.0778	0.320	0.0745	0.0778	0.340
Prof/manager class	0.2371	0.0730	0.001	0.2335	0.0730	0.001
Married	0.0748	0.0772	0.330	0.0697	0.0773	0.370
Separated	-0.0845	0.0955	0.380	-0.0911	0.0957	0.340
Sport nurture	-0.0330	0.0580	0.570	-0.0374	0.0581	0.520
Control	0.1815	0.0746	0.015	0.1726	0.0750	0.021
Optimism	-0.0255	0.0367	0.490	-0.0278	0.0368	0.450
Boost				-0.1148	0.0885	0.190
Civic engagements	0.0443	0.0147	0.003	0.0426	0.0148	0.004
Parent: intermed)	0.1077	0.0789	0.170	0.1098	0.0789	0.160
Parent: prof/manager	0.1753	0.0708	0.013	0.1754	0.0709	0.013
		Civic engagement				
Constant	-1.0722	0.2366	$< .001$	-0.8909	0.2383	$< .001$
Female	0.0241	0.0580	0.680	0.0259	0.0576	0.650
Age	0.0453	0.0098	$< .001$	0.0415	0.0098	$< .001$
Age^2	-0.0004	0.0001	$< .001$	-0.0003	0.0001	$< .001$
educ	0.1545	0.0248	$< .001$	0.1589	0.0247	$< .001$
Intermed class	0.1124	0.0760	0.140	0.1016	0.0755	0.180
Prof/manager class	0.2385	0.0738	0.001	0.2117	0.0735	0.004
Married	0.0593	0.0769	0.440	0.0271	0.0767	0.720
Separated	-0.0564	0.0935	0.550	-0.0892	0.0932	0.340
Income	0.0212	0.0123	0.086	0.0239	0.0123	0.051
TV hours	-0.0216	0.0064	$< .001$	-0.0232	0.0064	$< .001$
Watch TV news	-0.0175	0.0628	0.780	-0.0033	0.0625	0.960
Boost				-0.4076	0.0887	$< .001$
η	0.1323	1000	1.00	-0.0016	1000	1.00
		Variances				
σ^2_η	0.0000	1.1237	1.00	0.0000	1.1615	1.00
σ^2_ζ	0.5812	0.0487	$< .001$	0.5610	0.0479	$< .001$

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