

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIC PARTICIPATION

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Abstract

The concept of social capital has a long intellectual history in the field of social sciences. In recent years, interest of scholars from sociology, political science, economics and public administration is rapidly increasing. The reason for this increasing interest is that it has been aware of the importance of social capital in communities' administrative, social, economic and political development. In this sense, the concept of social capital is an issue to be discussed with solution of current problems of public administration, subjects of governance, civil society, and participation.

Social capital has a lot of definitions which are completely different from each other. Common point of these different definitions is that social capital is a resource at both individual and community level. We will use Robert Putnam's definition about social capital in this paper. Putnam (1993) defines social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action". In his book; Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of the American Community, Putnam describes declining social capital in America. He analyzes relationship between social capital and civic participation and assumes that there is a positive relationship between social capital and civic participation.

The paper aims to reveal how there is a relationship between social capital and civic participation in Central Florida. We will use "The Central Florida Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey that is made by The Survey Research Laboratory in the Institute for Social and Behavior Sciences at the University of Central Florida among central Florida residents. We use notion of civic participation not only as voting but also as concern of politics, volunteering, attending a political meeting, participating in any demonstrations, protests or boycotts, cooperating to solve problems and involvement local action. In addition, we analyze relationship between civic participation and trust level that citizens have about government and people because of the fact that trust is social capital's important element.

Key Words: *Social Capital, Civic Participation, Trust, Volunteering*

JEL Classification: **J24**

1. INTRODUCTION

The concept of social capital defines how connected people are to one another. Social capital is the resource represented by your familial and social connections so it is measured both at individual

and community level. At community level, social capital is a measure of health of a community social fabric (Wright and Jasinski, 2005:11).

We analyze social capital at community level in this study. The article examines how there is a relationship between social capital and civic participation in Central Florida. We will use “The Central Florida Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey that is made by The Survey Research Laboratory in the Institute for Social and Behavior Sciences at the University of Central Florida among central Florida residents. The survey consisted of sixty-seven questions providing quantitative data and answered by 1,606 citizens. Responses to questions were received through telephone surveys. At random, a computer-assisted method was used to call citizens living within Central Florida. We use notion of civic participation not only as voting but also as creating a community, concern of politics, volunteering, attending a political meeting, participating in any demonstrations, protests or boycotts, cooperating to solve problems and involvement local action. In addition, we analyze relationship between civic participation and trust level that citizens have about government and people because of the fact that trust is social capital’s important element.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Definition of Social Capital

The concept of social capital has a long history in social sciences but, the interest of scholars has started to increase in recent years. As a result of this increasing interest, social capital is defined in different perspectives by scholars. It has several definitions but the common point of different definitions is that it is identified as a resource both at individual level and collective level. In addition to, all of these definitions are emphasized social network, communication, social structure and social relationships as a common point.

The notion of social capital has started to be more popular since 1980s years. Pierre Bourdieu, James Coleman, and Robert Putnam’s studies have been effective in being more social capital’s popular. These scholars have defined the concept of social capital from different perspectives and contributed the social capital’s literature. Bourdieu (1992:119) identifies social capital as: “the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition” Bourdieu emphasizes the importance of networks in forming the social capital.

James Coleman (1988:98) defines the concept as: “Social capital is defined by its function. It is not a single entity but a variety of different entities, with two elements in common; they all consist of some aspect of social structures and they facilitate certain actions of actors—whether a person or corporate actors—within the structure” . Coleman stresses the importance of social structure in creating social capital.

Robert Putnam (1995:67) identifies social capital as “features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action” We use Putnam’s definition in this study. Because his definition is appropriate to subject of the study.

Putnam stresses the coordinated action for a society in his studies about social capital. Especially, Putnam (2000), in his book “Bowling Alone the Collapse and Revival of American Community”,

claims that civic and social ties in American society have weakened over the past several generations. A result of this situation is shortage of social capital in many communities. When social capital declines, there are negative results for a community. For example, the quality of community is threatened, public safety suffers, philanthropy weakens, economic development lags, and civic institutions become less responsive. A community which has inadequate social capital is distrustful, disengaged, and disenfranchised community (Wright and Jasinski, 2005: 4).

2.2. Civic Participation

Civic participation is an important component of the broader of construct social capital. Civic participation encompasses activities focused on problem solving and helping others (Zukin and etc., 2006:7).

Civic participation is defined as citizens' individual and collective involvement in public affairs. It is based on volunteering and includes both political and non-political activities (Park and. Perry, 2008:238-239). Civic participation activities are getting involved in campaigns, making political contributions, contacting government officials, affiliation with political organization, informal activity in local communities, creating a community, concern of politics, volunteering, attending a political meeting, participating in any demonstrations, protests or boycotts, cooperating to solve problems and involvement local action (Verba, Scholzman and Brady,1995:2-9, Putnam, 2000).Not only voting but also other participatory activities permit explicit statements of concerns or preferences (Verba, Scholzman and Brady, 1995:10).

Putnam also argues that civic participation includes different concepts. Political knowledge and interest in public affairs need for more active forms of involvement. It is necessary that there is active and interaction involvement for civic participation. For example, being a member of a committee is not enough for civic participation. When we participate a meeting in a committee, we must come to the meeting with other people .Because like these activities brings citizens together and clearly embody social capital (Putnam, 2000:35, 45).

2.3. Trust

Trust is a critical concept in measuring social capital in a community. (Conway, 2000:190). Trust is a complex notion so it has different definitions. Scholars define several sorts of trust. We give information only about types of generalized trust and particularized trust. Generalized trust is the perception that most people are part of your moral community. It is based on both morals and our collective experiences. In social capital surveys, generalized trust is asked with this survey question as "generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted or can't you be too careful in dealing with people?" Particularized trust is the perception that people unlike themselves are not part of their moral community (Uslaner, 2002: 28-29, Park and Shin, 2003:7). Generalized trust is essential for civic activities because it includes trust in strangers, or the people whom one does not know personally. Particularized trusters withdrawn from civic participation with people unlike themselves (Uslaner, 2002:34).

The scholars studying about social capital stress importance of trust for social capital. Coleman (1990:306) defines trust as essential part of social capital. Putnam (1993: 170-171,180) argues that trust lubricates cooperation and emphasizes that effective collaborative institutions require interpersonal skills and trust.

There is a positive relationship between civic participation and interpersonal trust. (Uslaner, 2001:113) Both of trust and civic participation creates a community a cooperative spirit. (Uslaner, 2007). Putnam (2000:137) has same idea about trust and civic participation and explains his idea as: “people who trust others are all-around good citizens, and those more engaged in community life are both more trusting and more trustworthy....the critically disengaged believe themselves to be surrounded by miscreants and feel less constrained to be honest themselves.

3. DATA

The analysis based on data collected by The Survey Research Laboratory in the Institute for Social and Behavior Sciences at the University of Central Florida among central Florida residents. Orange, Seminole, Osceola, Lake, Brevard, Volusia and Polk Counties were sampled different rates and the survey answered by 1,606 citizens. Responses to questions were received through telephone surveys. At random, a computer-assisted method was used to call citizens living within Central Florida.

The survey consisted of sixty-seven questions providing quantitative data. The survey begins and ends with questions that provide demographic information about the respondent. There are questions about religion, social activities in their community, diversity of friendship and political affairs in the survey. The respondent chose from a choice of answers for a question. These answers have been developed to include all possibilities and with concluding answer of “don’t know, not applicable, refused”.

In this study we use only questions about trust and civic participation. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) program was used in analysis of the data.

Table 1: Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Validity	1 People can be trusted	728	45.3	46.4	46.3
	2 You can be too careful	725	45.1	46.2	92.6
	3 Depends	116	7.2	7.4	100
	Total	1568	97,6	100	

To simply In table 1 we do not say Central Floridians appears trusting with each other. The rate of generalized trust is not much more.

Table 2: Trust in National Government, State Government and County Government

Level of Trust	National Government	State Government	County Government
Just about always	5.1	5.2	4.7
Most of the time	34.9	38.7	41.1
Some of the time	41.9	43.8	42.6
Hardly ever	18.2	13.3	11.7
Valid N=	1518	1498	1453

In Table 2, as can be seen, majorities ranging from 54% to 60% believe that governments at all levels can only be trusted to “do what is right” some of the time or hardly ever – far short of a ringing endorsement of the competence or honesty of elected officials. Local government is slightly the most trusted government.

Table 3: How much Central Floridians trust different groups of people?

Group	Trust ‘ A Lot’	Trust Not At All
People at church	77	2
Police	58	7
Co-workers	58	5
Neighbors	51	6
Store workers	36	7
Local news media	17	20

In Table 3, as can be seen, the level of trust varies dramatically depending on which group one asks about. The most trustworthy by far are one’s co-religionists, coming in at 77%, followed by police and co-workers, both at 58%. The level of trust that Central Floridians have in the local news media, the least trusted of all things. These results show that importance of particularized trust for Central Floridians.

Table 4: How interested are you in politics and national affairs?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Validity	1 Very interested	558	34.8	36.1	36.1
	2 Somewhat interested	609	37.9	39.4	75.5
	3 Only slightly interested	218	13.6	14.1	89.6
	4 Not at all interested	161	10.0	10.4	100.0
	Total	1546	96.3	100.0	

In table 4, as can be seen, 34.8 percent of Central Floridians who answered survey is interested in politics and national affairs. 23.6 % of respondents is “only slightly interested” and “not at all interested”.

Table 5: Did you vote in the presidential election of 2004?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Validity	1 Yes, voted	1261	78.5	81.6	81.6
	2 No, didn't voted	225	14.0	14.5	96.1
	3 Not eligible	60	3.7	3.9	100.0
	Total	1546	96.2	100.0	
Total	1606	100.0			

In table 5, as can be seen, the voting percentage of respondents is 78.5.

Table 6: In the past twelve months have you.... “(cell entries are the percentages “saying”)

Behaviour	% Yes Central Florida
Signed a petition	34
Attended a political meeting, rally	20
Participated any demonstrations, protests, boycotts or marches	5
Been involved with... a labor union	5
... an ethnic or civil rights organization	5
... other public interest groups	7
Take any local action for social or political reform	27

In table 6, as can be seen, non-electoral participation rate is not very much.

Table 7: How many times in the past twelve months have you volunteered?

Amount	Percentage
Never	21
Once	12
A few times	47
About once a month on average	11
Twice a month on average	5
About once a week on average	2
More often once a week	2

In table 7, we can say that volunteerism rate of Central Floridians is low.

4. CONCLUSION

The study reviewed social capital, civic participation and trust literature. It also gives information relationship between social capital and civic participation in Central Florida. The analysis supports that civic participation effects social capital. In addition, the survey results show that trust

is necessary for civic participation and generalized trust is an important element for coordination in a community.

In the survey, while voting rate is high, rate of other indicators of civic participation (volunteering, attending a political meeting, participating in any demonstrations, protests or boycotts, cooperating to solve problems and involvement local action) is low. Consequently, we can say that social capital in Central Florida is too low.

To increase social capital in Central Florida, the citizens must provide involvement of non-electoral participation activities. If it is done, level of generalized trust will increase.

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Acknowledgement: I would like to thank the Central Florida Social Capital Survey funding partners and Dr. Jim Wright for allowing us to use their survey in the paper.