ARTICLES

Building Social Capital: Civic Attitudes and Behavior of Public Servants

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ABSTRACT

This study compares public servants and other citizens with regard to several important civic attitudes and behaviors that are closely related to social capital. These attributes include social trust, social altruism, equality, tolerance, humanitarianism, and civic participation. The first five attributes provide soft evidence of social capital, but the last attribute—civic participation—is hard behavioral evidence. Finally, a rigorous test is applied: a multivariate model estimates the strength of public employment as a predictor of civic participation while it holds other theoretically important variables constant. The results show that public employment is a substantively important and highly significant predictor of civic participation. Overall, public servants are far more active in civic affairs than are other citizens, and they appear to be catalysts for the building of social capital in society at large.

INTRODUCTION

This study will assess the civic attitudes and the behavior of public servants and other citizens. First, civil society will be defined, and the importance of social capital in the larger scheme of this study will be explained. Second, public servants and other citizens will be compared with regard to several important civic attitudes and behaviors that are closely related to social capital. These attributes include social trust, social altruism, equality, tolerance, humanitarianism, and civic participation. The first five attributes provide soft evidence, but the sixth attribute—civic participation—is hard behavioral evidence of social capital as most scholars define the term. A rigorous test will then be applied: a multivariate model estimates the strength of public employment as a predictor of civic participation while it controls for an array of other variables. The results show that public servants are more altruistic and civic-minded than are other citizens, and they are more likely to participate in civic affairs. Thus public servants appear to be catalysts for the building of social capital in society at large. The findings will then be summarized and discussed.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Aristotle and other early Greek philosophers discussed the concept of civil society, and it was prominent in the work of modern democratic theorists such as John Locke, John Stuart

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Mill, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and Alexis de Tocqueville. More recently, Gabriel A. Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) emphasized the importance of civil society in their classic study of civic culture. Yet overall, the concept has remained somewhat abstract and loosely defined.

Peter Berger and Richard John Neuhaus (1977) helped to increase interest in civil society by explaining the crucial importance of *mediating structures* in modern society. These structures include families, churches, neighborhoods, and voluntary associations that mediate between individuals in their private lives and the large institutions of public life. Berger and Neuhaus argued that government should not undercut these mediating structures and, better yet, should try to strengthen and support them (also see Dionne 1997). Their work helped to clarify two points. First, civil society is separate and distinct from the state and market sectors, but it is deeply interactive with them (also see Boris 1994; Fullinwider 1999; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000).[1] Second, the bedrock of civil society is participation in voluntary associations, organizations, and networks that exist outside governmental and business sectors.

But why is civil society so important? Tocqueville had one explanation. Tocqueville observed political life in America to learn why "some communities prosper, possess effective political institutions, have law-abiding and satisfied citizens," while others do not (cited in Rahn 1997). He marveled at the way Americans form and participate in all types of civic associations, and he concluded that the success of the American experiment was due to the civic-minded attitudes and behavior of ordinary American citizens. The attitudes and behavior are closely related to Robert D. Putnam's concept of social capital.

Putnam (1993a) followed on Tocqueville's work by comparing northern and central Italy with the less prosperous southern region of the country. His central research question was similar to Tocqueville's: What are the conditions for creating strong, responsive, and effective governmental institutions? After careful study, Putnam reached a conclusion that was similar to Tocqueville's: Strong norms of social trust and high levels of civic participation powerfully affect a nation's prospects for effective, responsive self-government.[2] He said that these conditions are also conducive to economic development. Thus, Putnam argued, a vigorous civil society promotes effective democratic government and economic prosperity.[3]

Putnam captured the imagination of social scientists when he used the term *social capital* to explain where these facile mechanisms of voluntary cooperation come from. Putnam (1993a, p. 167) defined social capital as "features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions."

1 Civic and political participation are conceptually distinct (Brewer and Selden 1998b). However, as Putnam (1995b and 2000) explains, civic participation produces social capital, which is closely related to political participation. *Political participation* refers to our relations with political institutions. *Social capital*—based on social trust and civic participation—refers to our relations with one another. Similarly, social and political trust are correlated, but they are logically distinct. There is considerable debate about the causal ordering of these variables. For example, Brehm and Rahn (1997) report that civic engagement and social trust are in a tight reciprocal relationship, but the former appears to influence the latter most strongly. Similarly, Inglehart (1999) cites evidence of two-way causation between interpersonal trust and economic development rates.

2 Putnam (1993a) also found that social capital is related to public administrative performance, but he did not follow up on this important finding.

3 Muller and Seligson (1994) found that most civic culture attitudes do not have a direct effect on changes in democracy. However, they studied attitudes rather than behavior.

As James S. Coleman (1988) explained, social capital exists in the relations among persons.[4] He also said that such norms "depend on a dense and relatively closed social structure that has continuity over time" (1990, p. 9).[5] Wendy M. Rahn (1997) further explained that the key elements of social capital are high levels of social trust and civic participation (also see Brehm and Rahn 1997). Voluntary organizations are the foundation of social capital, and the denser these networks, the more likely people will engage in collective action. Such networks foster sturdy norms of cooperation and reciprocity, create channels of communication, enable collaboration, and discourage opportunistic or self-interested behavior (for example, see Fountain 1998).

Overall, social scientists have amassed a wide range of empirical evidence showing that the quality of public life and the performance of social institutions are powerfully influenced by norms and networks of civic engagement (Putnam 1993a and 2000). These networks of relationships—both formal and informal—build social capital, which is the lifeblood of thriving societies. Indeed, high levels of social capital appear to be related to economic performance, effective political institutions, and low rates of crime and other social ills such as delinquency and teen pregnancy (Fukuyama 1995; Hagan, Merkens, and Boehnke 1995; Putnam 1995a; Knack and Keefer 1997). Moreover, a review of the literature shows that social capital is gaining prominence on other research fronts (e.g., family and youth behavior problems; education; the environment; community life, work, and organizations; democracy and governance; collective action problems; health and nutrition; poverty; information technology; trade; and economic development [Adler and Kwon 1999]).

Another significant claim about the merits of civil society is that participation makes better citizens (Kaufman 1960; Pateman 1970; Mansbridge 1980 and 1995; Barber 1984; Gutmann 1987; M. E. Warren 1992; Morrell 1998). Yet this claim, advanced by participatory democratic theorists, is difficult to substantiate. As Jane Mansbridge (1995, p. 1) explains, "The kinds of subtle changes in character that come about slowly, from active, powerful participation in democratic decisions cannot easily be measured with the blunt instruments of social science." Tocqueville claimed that participation in democratic decisions develops individual character. He believed that political participation and participation in voluntary associations produces an interest in the common weal. Yet Tocqueville was thinking of voluntary associations in particular when he wrote, "[F]eelings and opinions are recruited, the heart is enlarged, and the human mind is developed only by the reciprocal influence of men upon one another" (1960 [1840], vol. 2, p. 117; cited in Mansbridge 1995 and 1997).

Despite these early ruminations, the heyday of the participatory democracy movement was in the 1960s and 1970s. Arnold Kaufman (1960) first coined the term, and he maintained that participation has many beneficial consequences such as the development of human powers of thought, feeling, and action. Across the Atlantic, a similar argument appeared in Carole Pateman's seminal work, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (1970). She asserted that participation leads to individual development, and that participation in nonpolitical realms develops the faculties that are required in order to participate in government.[6] But unlike Kaufman, Pateman was less interested in how participation would af-

4 Coleman (1990, chap. 12) distinguished social capital from human and economic capital, and he provided the fullest theoretical statement of the social capital concept.

5 However, Burt (1992) argues that open, sparse structures are more likely to spawn cooperation.

6 Pateman maintained that greater citizen participation would increase education, integration, and acceptance of decisions.

fect the individual than in how it would affect the political system. For her, the end goal of participation was democracy.

Peter Bachrach (1975) then argued that democratic participation mainly helps individuals discover their own true interests (also see Mansbridge 1980). This insight led some democratic theorists to focus attention on the deliberative functions of participation rather than on its educative effects (for example, see Dryzek 1990; Fishkin 1991; Bohman 1996; Gutmann and Thompson 1996). However, as Mansbridge (1997, p. 11) writes, "Each is the means to the other's end." Democratic deliberation is informative, and well-informed participants realize the importance of deliberation. Even so, interest in the educative functions of participation waned in the 1980s, largely because empirical studies failed to show that participation has clear and beneficial effects on the individual (Mansbridge 1995 and 1997; Morrell 1998).

Recent studies show more promise, however. Researchers have found that high levels of social trust and civic participation—the key elements of social capital—are related to a variety of desirable outcomes. For example, trust is an indicator of social cohesion and solidarity, a condition for advancing economic transactions between strangers, and an impetus for participation in public life (M. R. Warren 1995; Rahn 1997; Brehm and Rahn 1997). There is also evidence that "people who can trust others are themselves more trustworthy—that is, they are less likely to cheat, steal, and lie, and they are more likely to cooperate with others" (Rahn 1997).

In summary, in a civil society social capital has beneficial effects for citizens both individually and collectively. Social capital is linked to individual development, effective democratic government, and economic prosperity (Putnam 1993b; Fukuyama 1995; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Foley and Edwards 1997; Inglehart 1999). Moreover, social capital appears to improve the overall quality of life in society at large. Any decline in social capital is thus a cause for grave concern.

THE ALLEGED DECLINE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL IN THE UNITED STATES

Putnam (1995a and b) has assembled convincing evidence that Americans' level of civic involvement has declined steadily since the 1960s. He says this decline in social capital contributes to Americans' loss of trust in each other and in their government, undermines democracy, cripples the economy, and ultimately threatens the future of human civilization (for similar accounts, see the edited work by Skocpol and Fiorina 1999).[7] Specifically, Putnam catalogs a sharp decline in social capital over the past generation, as measured by a variety of indices of participation in church-related groups, labor unions, PTAs, traditional women's clubs, fraternal organizations, and mainline civic organizations. For instance, General Social Surveys documents a drop of about one-fourth in group membership since 1974, and a drop of roughly one-third in social trust since 1972 (Putnam 1995b).

Putnam's claims have stirred considerable debate in the social science community, and researchers have begun to investigate these claims. For example, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) interviewed more than 15,000 Americans and confirmed some of Putnam's

7 Putnam (1995a; 1995b; 2000) has presented the most extensive evidence of declining civic engagement in the United States, studying activities as diverse as community meetings, social networks, and associational membership. However, some scholars are critical of the social capital concept (for example, see Levi 1996; Portees and Landolt 1996) while others maintain that civic involvement has actually increased in recent years (for example, see Ladd 1996; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady, 1995).

findings. However, the authors found strong evidence that Americans have high levels of involvement in voluntary associations.[8] They also found evidence that participation has increased at the local level and that decreased voting is not accompanied by a general decrease in citizen activism or campaign related activities.

The National Commission on Civic Renewal (NCCR) has also studied civic engagement. NCCR created the Index of National Civic Health (INCH) which comprises twenty-two quantitative measures in five important categories: political participation, trust, family strength, group membership, and personal security. The INCH fell by more than 20 percent between 1984 and 1994, but it rose substantially in 1997—the latest year for which statistics are available (NCCR 1999). While all five categories of the index rose, the largest improvements were in trust and personal security.

Studies that show declining social capital cause alarm, but is this alarm justified? The data do not supply a definitive answer, according to Rahn (1997). Yet the decline in social trust is "incontrovertible." In 1960, about 55 percent of Americans believed that they could trust most people. By 1995, only 35 percent believed this. Greater distrust is visible in all age groups, but it is especially pronounced among baby boomers (born between 1946 and 1964) and members of Generation X (born since 1964). Research has identified some factors that explain why some people are trusting. In general, whites are more trusting than minorities; but people who fear or experience crime are more distrustful. Children who grow up in poverty, live in broken homes, or experience their parents' divorce are also more distrustful. People who distrust government are more likely to distrust fellow citizens (Rahn 1997; Nye, Zelikow, and King 1997).

Today, civic participation seems healthier than political participation, especially among the young who are interested in contributing to society and correcting social and economic inequalities (Mansbridge 1995; Rahn 1997; Institute of Politics 2000). Still, these researchers argue that the decline in social trust involves most of the major institutions of American life—families, schools, churches, the mass media—as well as failures of political leadership. Simply reviving networks of civic engagement will not restore social trust, they say.

Andrew Kohut (1997) interviewed Philadelphians to capture forms of civic participation that were missed by previous surveys. He focused on social activities, civic activities, volunteer work, and community action. His findings challenge many claims from the "Bowling Alone" debate. Kohut concluded that Philadelphians were more active in civic affairs than had been expected, and most felt empowered to make their communities a better place.[9] The high levels of civic participation reported in the survey were accompanied by low levels of social trust, but the deficit in social trust had not lessened community involvement.[10] Thus concern about declining social trust may be exaggerated or misplaced.[11]

8 The 1995 Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University national survey found that 80 percent of the people do not regularly participate in a civic organization (cf. Kohut 1997).

9 More than half had joined or contributed money to an organization or social cause in the past year. Almost as many had worked with coworkers to solve a problem. Thirty percent had both attended civic meetings and contacted elected officials in the past year. Ninety-two percent had engaged in some type of civic activity, and 83 percent were involved in two or more activities in the past year.

10 As this study will show, demographic characteristics are much more crucial to citizen engagement than social trust. Kohut (1997) found that race was the most important determinant of social trust, followed by other socioeconomic factors such as education and income. Like the Rahn surveys, the Pew study reveals "a big age factor" as well—the young and poorly educated rank lowest in social trust.

11 Kohut (1997) discovered that social trust has little effect on volunteerism. Blacks with low levels of social trust

Even if low social trust does not affect participation, it may matter in other ways (Rahn 1997).

In summary, the data do not provide definitive answers about the alleged decline in social capital or its effects. This ambiguity is due in part to the slippery nature of the construct, for which researchers have utilized different definitions and measures. Yet social scientists of different persuasions seem to agree on two points. First, social capital is vitally important to individuals and society. Second, social capital is an elusive concept; however, two key elements are social trust and civic participation.

CIVIC ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR RELATED TO SOCIAL CAPITAL

Although social capital was originally conceived as a community-wide concept, it is manifest —and should be observable—at the individual level. Brehm and Rahn (1997, pp. 1001–2 and the accompanying Figure 1) contend that social capital is manifest in a tight reciprocal relationship between social trust and civic participation (also see Rahn 1997).[12] This study embraces their operational definition of the construct. Furthermore, Brehm and Rahn suggest that several other constructs are closely related to social capital. Accordingly, in this section I will examine social trust, social altruism, equality, tolerance, humanitarianism, and civic participation. These constructs will be described in more detail.

Social Trust

Many scholars who write about social capital underscore the importance of social trust (Coleman 1988; Putnam 1993a and b; Fukuyama 1995; Rahn 1997; Leana and Van Buren 1999). Putnam (1993b) maintains that social trust is the foundation of moral behavior on which social capital is built. Yet trust is a complex, multidimensional construct that has many meanings (Lewis and Weigert 1985; Williamson 1993, 453; McKnight and Chervany 1999). As a result, the role of trust in social capital varies (Adler and Kwon 1999). Research shows that social trust is correlated with civic norms and civic participation (Knack and Keefer 1997; Brehm and Rahn 1997).[13] Social trust is also linked with civic culture (Almond and Verba 1963; Muller and Seligson 1994), political participation (Knack 1991 and 1992), and trust in government (Brewer and Selden 1998b; Wuthnow 1998; Lipset and Schneider 1987). Fukuyama (1995) contends that high trust societies generate more social capital, and thus they enjoy greater economic growth. That is, social trust begets cooperation with strangers, which is essential for large-scale economic activities (Banfield 1958; Putnam 1993b and c; Fukuyama 1995; Knack and Keefer 1997; Inglehart 1999). Citing data from the World Values Survey, Inglehart explains that social trust and subjective well-being are closely linked with stable democracy and economic progress (also see Foley and Edwards 1997).

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are as likely as whites to volunteer. There is a stronger relationship between trust and political engagement. Less trusting people are less likely to vote, attend political meetings, or contact public officials.

12 Allowing for bidirectional causality, Brehm and Rahn (1997) found that the connection is stronger from civic participation to social trust.

13 Some of the studies cited here refer to social trust as interpersonal trust. Knack (1992, p. 4) refers to social trust as "conditional cooperation" and explains that "one's beliefs concerning the willingness of others to cooperate will influence one's own propensity to vote, give to charities, etc." (also see Hardin 1982; Fountain 1998).

Social Altruism

Social altruism involves thinking and acting in helping ways; thus, it is an important construct related to social capital. The social altruism measurement construct was introduced by Stephen Knack (1992), who found that the following items load on a common factor: charitable giving, volunteer work, census participation, working to solve community problems, and willingness to serve on juries. Knack then showed that social altruism helps to explain voter turnout in national elections.

Equality

Support for equality is another construct related to social capital. Tocqueville was amazed at the American people's "passion for equality" and how it permeated their civic and political affairs. Indeed, equality is a core civic value embodied in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and the Bill of Rights (Frederickson 1997; Fullinwider 1999). For this study, support for equality is measured with a six-item index created by political researchers and tested in previous national election studies (Bowers 1995).

Tolerance

Another construct related to social capital is tolerance. People who are more tolerant of others and more accepting of diversity probably produce more social capital. This construct is measured with survey items similar to those used in previous studies (Stouffer 1955; Sullivan, Marcus, and Marcus 1979; Greene, Giammo, and Mellow 1998). Respondents were asked the extent to which they believe whites, blacks, and Hispanics are hardworking and intelligent. The resulting six items are combined to form a tolerance index.

Humanitarianism

Humanitarianism is a sense of responsibility for other people's well-being and needs, and it also seems to be related to social capital. Political researchers have developed survey items that tap this construct, but they disagree about its efficacy and measurement (Bartels 1995; Steenbergen 1995). While humanitarianism is closely related to social capital, it also has relevance for public administration. Past research shows that some public servants exhibit humanitarian traits (Brewer, Selden, and Facer 2000), but no studies have estimated the prevalence of these traits among public servants or the general population. More important, no studies have tried to determine whether public servants as a group are more humanitarian than other citizens.

Civic Participation

Lastly, most researchers agree that civic participation is the most direct measure of social capital.[14] Civic associations produce many goods, including sturdy norms of generalized

14 Discretionary time activities are essential to individuals' well-being, happiness, satisfaction, and quality of life (Andrews and Withey 1976; Campbell, Converse, and Rogers 1976). Smith, Macaulay, and Associates (1980) were the first researchers to study informal voluntary activity carefully and comprehensively. They concluded that seemingly unrelated forms of individual discretionary behavior have common roots. These roots are similar to those of

reciprocity and social trust. Putnam (1993a) regarded civic engagement as the core of his social capital concept, and he argued that it (civic engagement) can revitalize American democracy (Putnam 1993c). Many studies contend that participating in nonpolitical organizations provides the skills necessary to participate in the political sphere as well (Verba and Nie 1972; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995). Yet causality is hard to assess (Muller and Seligson 1994; Brewer and Selden 1998b).

The civic attitudes and behavior of public servants are particularly important considering Putnam's (1993a) finding that social capital is related to public administrative performance—a finding that he did not follow up. Thus, the relevance for public administration is straightforward. We want public servants to be civic minded, and we want them to be active in civic affairs. This is because public servants' contributions are needed and because civic engagement may make them better citizens and better public servants. Overall, we know little about public servants' civic attitudes and behavior beyond conventional wisdom and anecdotal accounts, and prevalent bureaucratic stereotypes imply that they are similar to or worse than other citizens (Brewer 2001a and b). Thus, this study is framed by the null hypothesis reflected in mainstream public administration thought:

H_1 Public servants and other citizens do not differ in their civic attitudes and behavior.

The following secondary hypotheses will be examined:

H_{1a} Public servants and other citizens do not differ in their general level of social trust.

H_{1b} Public servants and other citizens do not differ in their general level of social altruism.

H_{1c} Public servants and other citizens do not differ in their general level of support for equality.

H_{1d} Public servants and other citizens do not differ in their general level of tolerance.

H_{1e} Public servants and other citizens do not differ in their general level of humanitarianism.

H_{1f} Public servants and other citizens do not differ in their general level of civic participation.

DATA AND METHODS

Data for this study come from the 1996 American National Election Study (NES) conducted by the Center for Political Studies, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan

formal social participation. Moreover, different types of formal and informal participation often covary. Across all countries and cultures, one thing is clear: people participate more frequently in informal activities than in formal ones (Robinson, Converse, and Szalai 1972).

(Rosenstone et al. 1998).[15] NES has covered all presidential and midterm elections since 1952, making it the longest running social science survey in the world. As a result, NES produces data sets of unprecedented quality that have been used in hundreds of empirical studies (National Election Studies 1998).[16]

NES surveys investigate a range of substantive issues with emphasis on electoral politics and public policy. In addition, each survey includes several new themes of topical importance. The 1996 survey is most appropriate for this study because it provides measures of all relevant concepts. That is, the survey instrument includes a question that identifies public servants and other citizens, an assortment of demographic variables, and a battery of questions that probe civic attitudes and behavior. These attributes include social trust, social altruism, equality, tolerance, humanitarianism, and civic participation.

The data set consists of 1,714 cases designed to form a nationally representative sample of the American electorate. The study population for the 1996 NES includes all U.S. citizens of voting age on or before election day. *Eligible citizens* is defined as those residing in the forty-eight coterminous states, excluding persons living in Alaska or Hawaii. (For more detailed information on voting and registration in the November 1996 election, see Casper and Bass [1998].) All presidential year surveys are two-wave panels; thus, the response rate was 71 percent for the preelection phase and 90 percent for reinterviews.[17]

The key sorting variable for this study comes from the following survey question: Are/were you employed by a federal, state or local government?[18] After recoding, the sample included 339 public servants (19.8 percent) and 1,375 other citizens (80.2 percent). This variable allows direct comparisons to be made between public servants and other citizens on the traits of interest. Several demographic variables included in the 1996 NES data set are also utilized in this study. They include the respondent's age, race, gender, education, income, and marital status.[19] (Information that shows how the relevant civic attributes are operationalized is available at www.jpart.oupjournals.org.) Each construct is measured with a multiple-item index. The measure of civic participation is particularly sensitive. This measure is based broadly on Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's (1995) variable *nonpolitical organization activity* and Putnam's (1995b) measure of *civic engagement*. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady's measure includes both involvement and financial contributions to nonpolitical organizations. Putnam's conception of civic engagement focuses on the extent to

15 These materials are based on work supported by the National Science Foundation under the following grant numbers: SBR-9707741, SBR-9317631, SES-9209410, SES-9009379, SES-8808361, SES-8341310, SES-8207580, and SOC77-08885. Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these materials are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Science Foundation.

16 For electronic access to the data set and related documentation, see the NES Web site, www.umich.edu/~nes.

17 Survey nonresponse has been studied extensively, but there is little reason to believe that it will materially affect the findings reported in this study, which largely consist of comparisons between public servants and other citizens.

18 This question has appeared in NES studies since 1986 and is now considered a core question. For this study, the public servant variable was constructed by adding responses from the following categories of respondents: those working now, temporarily laid off, retired and not working, permanently disabled, homemakers, and students. Eight cases involving unemployed respondents formerly employed by government were coded "other citizens."

19 Respondent's age is coded as an interval-level variable (mean = 47.54, s.d. = 17.41). Respondent's race is coded (0) nonminority and (1) minority. The distribution is 77.3 percent nonminority and 22.2 percent minority, with 0.5 percent missing. Respondent's gender is coded (0) male and (1) female. The distribution is 44.8 percent male and 55.2 percent female. Respondent's education (mean = 4.10, s.d. = 1.65) is coded as follows: (1) 8 grades or less and no diploma or equivalency; (2) 9-11 grades, no further schooling (including 12 years without diploma or equivalency); (3) high school diploma or equivalency test; (4) more than 12 years of schooling, no higher degree; (5) junior or community college level degrees (AA degrees); (6) BA level degrees; 17+ years, no advanced degree; and

which people connect with life in their communities, including membership and participation in organizations as well as other means of socializing and interacting. This study probes membership and participation in twenty-two types of civic associations. Cronbach's alpha for the five-item measurement scale is .94—well above the threshold level of .70 recommended by Carmines and Zeller (1979).

The appendix reports means, standard deviations, and correlations between the variables. Overall, respondents reported relatively high levels on each construct, and fully 85 percent of those who answered the civic participation questions reported some type of activity. As the appendix shows, there is no problematic multicollinearity between the variables.[20]

FINDINGS

Table 1 reports mean differences between public servants and other citizens on the five civic attitudes related to social capital. First, public servants score higher on the social trust index, showing that they are slightly more trustful than other citizens. However, the difference is small and barely significant ($p<.05$). Second, public servants score higher on the social altruism index, showing that they are more altruistic and helping than other citizens are. Here, the difference is larger and quite significant ($p<.001$). Third, public servants score higher on the equality index, thus expressing stronger support for the goal of equality than other citizens score. This finding is significant at the .01 level. Fourth, public servants score higher on the tolerance index than do other citizens, indicating that public employees are more tolerant and more accepting of diversity than other citizens are. This finding is also significant at the .01 level. Fifth, public servants score higher on the humanitarianism index than do other citizens—a finding that also achieves a modest level of statistical significance ($p<.01$). In total, the means tests show that public servants are more civic minded than other citizens are. Specifically, they are more trustful, altruistic, supportive of equality, tolerant, and humanitarian than other citizens are.

Table 1
Civic Attitudes of Public Servants and Other Citizens—Difference of Means

	Public Servants (N = 304)	Other Citizens (N = 1,201)	t Test
Social trust	16.50	16.07	2.16*
Social altruism	3.12	2.70	5.15***
Equality	20.17	19.28	2.94**
Tolerance	27.41	26.48	2.79**
Humanitarianism	18.96	18.40	2.56**

* Significant at .05 level. ** Significant at .01 level. *** Significant at .001 level.

(7) advanced degree, including LLB. A categorical coding scheme is used for respondent's income (mean = 11.68, s.d. = 6.66). The categories range from 1 (none or less than $2,999) to 24 ($105,000 and over). Marital status is coded (0) unmarried and (1) married. The distribution is 45.7 unmarried and 54.3 percent married.

20 Past research provides important precedents for measuring these variables. Cronbach's alpha for the five measurement scales are: social trust, .70; social altruism, .48 (all five items load together on factor analysis); equality, .71; tolerance, .80; and humanitarianism, .43 (the five items do not load together on factor analysis). The alpha reliability coefficient for humanitarianism was considered more problematic because factor analysis revealed the presence of

Table 2
Humanitarianism of Public Servants and Other Citizens—Difference of Means

	Public Servants (N = 304)	Other Citizens (N = 1,201)	t Test
Item 1	4.27	4.33	–1.34
Item 2	4.27	4.33	–1.24
Item 3	3.34	3.18	2.35**
Item 4	3.60	3.38	3.32***
Item 5	3.53	3.20	2.65**
Humanitarianism index	18.96	18.40	2.56**

Note: Item 1: One should always find ways to help others less fortunate than oneself. Item 2: A person should always be concerned about the well-being of others. Item 3: It is best not to get too involved in taking care of other people's needs (reversed). Item 4: People tend to pay more attention to the well-being of others than they should (reversed). Item 5: ONE, it is more important to be a self-reliant person able to take care of oneself; or TWO, it is more important to be a cooperative person who works well with others.

The measurement scale for items 1–4 is 1, disagree strongly; 2, disagree somewhat; 3, neither agree nor disagree; 4, agree somewhat; 5, agree strongly. The scale for Item 5 is 1, more important to be self-reliant; 5, more important to be cooperative. Responses to items 3 and 4 are reversed so that all items tend in a positive direction.
** Significant at .01 level. *** Significant at .001 level.

Table 2 further examines the humanitarianism construct. The five measurement items show mixed results, and they do not load together on factor analysis (see details below). Thus, results are reported for both the individual measurement items and the composite index. As Table 2 shows, there are no statistically significant differences between public servants and other citizens on measurement items 1 and 2 ("one should always find ways to help others less fortunate than oneself"; "a person should always be concerned about the well-being of others"). However, public servants score higher to a statistically significant degree on measurement items 3 and 4. That is, public servants more strongly disagreed with the following statements: "it is best not to get too involved in taking care of other people's needs"; "people tend to pay more attention to the well-being of others than they should." Item 5 was a forced choice question, with respondents choosing either "it is more important to be a self-reliant person able to take care of oneself," or "it is more important to be a cooperative person who works well with others." Public servants were more likely to choose the latter option, and thus they scored higher than other citizens scored on this question to a statistically significant degree.[21]

Next, on the humanitarianism index that is described above, the scores range from 5 to 25; higher scores indicate stronger humanitarian qualities. The mean of the index is 18.52 and the standard deviation is 3.43. As I have already noted and as is shown in Tables 1 and 2, public servants score higher than do other citizens on average ($p<.01$), but the raw difference between the two groups is not very large.

Civic participation is examined next. As Table 3 shows, public servants report sharply higher levels of civic participation than do other citizens. In total, public servants scored 14.19

two dimensions consisting of two measurement items each. The remaining item—respondent's choice between self-reliance and cooperation—did not load on either dimension. Thus, the five-item scale yielded three distinct empirical constructs and was not deemed very reliable.

21 Individuals who work in nonprofit and third-sector organizations may have motives similar to public servants, but they are coded "other citizens" in this study. The question, of course, is whether these respondents are masking differences on the first two items.

Table 3
Civic Participation of Public Servants and Other Citizens—Difference of Means

	Public Servants (N = 310)	Other Citizens (N = 1,218)	t Value
No. of groups R is involved in	3.28	2.21	7.80***
No. of groups R is a member of	3.77	2.39	7.36***
No. of groups R pays dues to	3.20	2.07	6.62***
No. of groups R has had activities in	2.69	1.75	6.07***
No. of groups that discuss politics	1.25	0.67	5.07***
Civic participation index (total)	14.19	9.10	7.37***

*** Significant at .001 level.

compared with 9.10 for other citizens—a large and substantively as well as statistically significant difference. In other words, the civic participation rate for public servants is more than one-third higher than the rate reported by other citizens. Next, the five measurement items that make up the civic participation index are examined individually to see if the intergroup differences are uniform.

On all five items, public servants score approximately one-third higher than other citizens score. The difference on each item is quite large and statistically significant at the .001 level, confirming that public servants are more actively engaged in all five forms of civic affairs than are other citizens. First, on average, public servants report being involved in more civic groups than do other citizens (3.28 compared with 2.21). Second, public servants report belonging to more civic groups than other citizens on average (3.77 compared with 2.39). Membership in civic organizations is an important indicator of social capital, which Putnam (1993a, p. 167) describes as the "trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions." Third, public servants report paying dues to more civic groups than other citizens on average (3.20 compared with 2.07). Fourth, on average, public servants report performing activities in more civic groups than do other citizens (2.69 compared with 1.75). Fifth, public servants report belonging to more civic groups that discuss politics than do other citizens on average (1.25 compared with 0.67).

Next, a multivariate model predicts civic participation. As I have already mentioned, civic participation is the single best indicator of social capital, in part because it involves concrete behavior that can be measured. Since research on political participation is more advanced than research on civic participation, the proposed model draws heavily on this former body of work.

Many variables influence political participation.[22] In a literature review on the topic, Jan E. Leighley (1995, p. 181) notes that socioeconomic status (SES) and political attitudes are traditional predictors, but mobilization factors need to be included. In the SES model, "participation is primarily driven by individuals' resources (time, money, skills) and civic orientations—attitudes which individuals hold toward themselves or the political system which predispose them toward political action" (p. 183). Rosenstone and Hansen (1993) argue that an important ingredient in any explanation of political participation is "strategic mobilization." Further, Verba and Nie (1972) contend that participation in civic organiza-

22 This body of research is voluminous and beyond the scope of this study. For a good synthesis of the literature, see Leighley (1995).

tions teaches skills that are needed for political participation. Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) formulate and test the civic voluntarism model, which is closely related to the resource model proposed by Brady, Verba, and Schlozman. Finally, as Verba, Schlozman, and Brady suggest, *free time* is an opportunity variable.[23] As Americans become more tied to their work, they have less time for direct involvement in public affairs (Schor 1991). The assumption is that individuals with more free time will participate in more civic and political activities. Thus the model that predicts civic participation includes time, money, and civic skills, arguing that these skills are developed in workplaces, organizations, and churches and synagogues.

The model also includes an array of demographic factors that are important predictors of participation, in part because they reflect individual ties to the community (Timpone 1998a). Age, race, gender, marital status, education, and income are all related to social connectedness, but the impact of the latter two on electoral participation does not appear to be mediated by social connectedness (for example, see Timpone 1998b).

The final demographic variable is public employment—the variable of interest. Conway (2001, p. 31) explained that public employees "tend to have high levels of political interest, to be more knowledgeable about politics, to follow politics more in the mass media, *and to have a higher sense of civic duty*" (emphasis added). Previous studies have found that public employment is related to attitudes and behaviors that suggest greater participation (Blais, Blake, and Dion 1990; Brewer and Selden 1998b). The design of this study allows us to test an important premise of the theory and, relatedly, to resolve a nagging controversy in the literature. Survey-based research has long shown that public employees report more altruistic attitudes than do business employees (for details, see Rainey 1997, chap. 9). Studies also have shown that public employees are more supportive of democratic values (Blair and Garand 1995), and they vote more frequently than other citizens (for example, see Rosenbloom and Featherstonhaugh 1977; Wolfinger and Rosenstone 1980, chap. 6; Garand, Parkhurst, and Seoud 1991a and b; and Watson 1997). The controversy is over how to interpret these findings. Some scholars marshal such findings to support a theory of public service motivation (PSM), which suggests that public employees are strongly motivated to perform public, community, and social service (Brewer and Selden 1998a; Brewer, Selden, and Facer 2000; Perry 2000). On the other hand, some scholars invoke rational choice theory to explain these findings: Public employees are dependent on the state for their economic livelihoods, so it is in their self-interest to manifest progovernment attitudes and participate in politics (Garand, Parkhurst, and Seoud 1991a and b). The rational choice explanation is logically plausible, and it has proven more convincing than PSM to many observers. A major problem is that most studies that show public employees have altruistic attitudes and perform prosocial behaviors have not been able to rule out self-interest.

The design of this study allows us to test a central premise of PSM theory advanced by Brewer and Selden (1998a, p. 417). This premise states that PSM is prevalent among public employees. In order to test this premise, we systematically compare the attitudes and behavior of public employees with that of other citizens. Our PSM-related measures are civic and political participation. Both PSM and rational choice theories predict that public employees will report higher levels of political participation than will other citizens. However, the key question is whether they will report higher levels of civic participation. PSM

23 Schor (1991) shows that Americans are spending more time working and are devoting less time to leisure activities and civic affairs.

theory predicts *yes,* while rational choice theory predicts *no* or *no difference.*[24] Rational choice theory cannot easily explain a positive finding, for public employees do not derive any direct economic benefit from participation in nonpolitical civic affairs. Such activities involve self-sacrifice rather than self-interest, and self-sacrifice is a defining feature of PSM (Perry 1996; Brewer and Selden 1998a; Brewer, Selden, and Facer 2000). Such a finding would seem to confirm that public employees are motivated by a strong desire to perform public service rather than by self-interest.

The model includes other variables that may impact civic participation. People with more years of formal education tend to be more politically active, possess higher levels of social capital, and demonstrate greater levels of tolerance (Greene, Giammo, and Mellow 1998; Nie, Junn, and Stehlik-Barry 1996; Verba et al. 1995; Putnam 1995b). Many models of political participation, civic participation, and social capital include additional controls for items such as political ideology and party affiliation (Greene, Giammo, and Mellow 1998). This model does not control for these and other variables (but see note 25). Excluding some variables that are commonly found in models of political participation may not be a problem, however. There are important differences between political and civic participation. In addition, omitted variable bias is only a problem when the omitted independent variable is related to the dependent variable and independent variable that are being studied. In this case, the variable of interest is public employment. The model does not control for some variables that may predict civic participation but that are not strongly related to public employment because measures were not available or because these variables are more the product of public employment—for instance, public service socialization—rather than the cause.[25] The present model controls for the most important factors that are related both to civic participation and to public employment, thus giving an estimate of the independent effect of public employment with some confidence.

Table 4 presents the findings on predicting civic participation.[26] Overall, the model explains 37 percent of the variance in the dependent variable, and seven variables are statistically significant. Both age and education are statistically significant predictors of civic participation; civic participation rises with age. Some scholars have suggested that the relationship between age and participation is more complex, that an individual's civic participation peaks at middle age and then declines (for discussion, see Verba and Nie 1972, pp. 138–48). However, this study finds no evidence of a curvilinear relationship between age and civic participation,[27] which is consistent with Putnam's (1995b) inability to find evidence that supports a life cycle hypothesis by using 1972–1994 General Social Survey (GSS) data. Education also has a significant, positive impact on a respondent's civic par-

24 Rational choice theory might predict *no* on the assumption that public employees are more self-interested and more likely to shirk social obligations than are other citizens.

25 Previous research has shown that individuals who work for government are more liberal than is the general population, and liberalism has long been associated with social activism. Thus a liberalism variable was created from a seven-item conservative-liberal self-placement scale. This variable was dropped from the final model because it did not affect the predictive power of the public servant variable, and it did not improve the overall fit of the model as a whole. In a related matter, several variables could be operationalized differently. Yet overall, the results did not seem sensitive to the particular formulation of the indices.

26 This analysis is based on cross-sectional data, much like Sidney Verba and colleagues' recent research on political participation (Brady, Verba, and Schlozman 1995; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995; Verba et al. 1995). It does not attempt to explain historic trends in civic participation as does the work of Robert Putnam.

27 Several different functional forms were tried, but none improved the fit of the model or achieved statistical significance.

Table 4
Predicting Civic Participation

Variables	Unstandardized Coefficient	Standard Error	Standardized Coefficient
Age	.05***	.01	.08
Race	–.69	.59	–.03
Gender	.87	.49	.04
Education	1.07***	.17	.17
Income	–.51***	.13	–.34
Income*income[a]	.03***	.01	.50
Married	.53	.47	.03
Public servant	2.75***	.58	.11
Social trust	.18	.10	.05
Social altruism	2.85***	.19	.37
Equality	.14**	.05	.07
Tolerance	–.06	.06	–.03
Humanitarianism	.11	.07	.10

Note: R^2, .38; adjusted R^2, .37; F value, 59.11; sample size, 1,714.
[a]To test for curvilinear effects, the income variable is squared.
**Significant at .01 level. ***Significant at .001 level.

ticipation. It is not, however, the most powerful predictor of civic participation, as Putnam suggested (1995b).[28] Some scholars attribute the influence of education to skills and resources the individual obtains that increase the likelihood of getting involved (for example, see Verba, Schlozman, and Brady 1995).

The model controls for income and, as with age and education, considers that the relationship between income and civic participation may be curvilinear. This time the effects are present. Civic participation is higher among the more affluent segments of society, and it is lower among the less affluent. Putnam's research shows that—over time—declines in civic engagement have been greater among the higher income strata; however, we find that these individuals are still more likely to engage in civic affairs. The study does not find a statistically significant difference in civic participation because of minority status, gender, or marital status.

Table 4 reveals that two civic attitudes related to social capital have a statistically significant impact on civic participation: social altruism and support for equality. Social trust, tolerance, and humanitarianism all have a relatively weak and insignificant impact.

Finally, the public servant variable has a modestly strong and highly significant impact on civic participation. As expected, public servants are more active in civic affairs than are other citizens. Apparently public servants manifest more civic-minded norms and have a stronger proclivity to engage in civic-minded behaviors. This finding is particularly important, since the model controls for other factors that are often cited as rival explanations for differences in the attitudes and behaviors of public servants and other citizens.[29]

28 I also examined whether the relationship between education and civic participation was nonlinear, but there was no evidence to support this possibility. Another plausible explanation for the relationship between education and civic participation is that education provides economic advantages; individuals with more education are more secure economically, and therefore they are better able to participate.

29 Some scholars contend that social capital is the product of social trust and civic participation (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Rahn 1997). Accordingly, a social capital variable was created from this definition and a multivariate analysis was performed on it. The results were similar to the results reported here.

CONCLUSION

Rational choice theory allows that public servants will exhibit progovernment sentiments and participate in politics because of self-interest. However, this study casts serious doubt on the rational choice interpretation by showing that public employees are more civic minded than are other citizens, and they are more likely to participate in civic affairs. The clear implication is that public employees are motivated by a strong desire to perform public, community, and social service.

Recent governmental reinvention efforts champion self-interest and reject democratic citizenship, civic culture, and the public interest broadly conceived (Light 1997; DeLeon and Denhardt 2000). Yet across the social sciences, researchers are finding that civil society, social capital, and civic engagement are important. Most of those who write about social capital do not explain how it can be created except in very abstract terms, however. A few scholars insist that government can build social capital by fostering civic networks (for example, see Evans 1996; Skocpol 1997; Skocpol, Ganz, and Munson 2000). Others contend that public policy plays a seminal role in strengthening local governments and private associations (Jackman and Miller 1998; Levy 1999; Tarrow 1996). Yet Inglehart (1999) has argued that there is no institutional quick fix for the problem of creating trust and social capital. Trust reflects the entire historical heritage of a society—not just that of political institutions.

Governmental institutions and institutionalized norms are prominent in Putnam's (1993a) thick description of life in northern Italy, but they are notably absent in his subsequent theoretical analysis. There he narrows his focus to dense networks of associational activity and neglects the possible role of government in fostering civil society and attendant social capital. In sharp contrast, in a recent issue of the *American Political Science Review*, Theda Skocpol and colleagues (2000) present convincing empirical evidence that government has had a seminal influence on associational activity writ large. The present study emboldens and advances their finding by showing that public employees are catalysts for building social capital at the individual level. That is, in addition to their formal job roles, which often involve pursuing the common good and furthering the public interest, public servants also perform a variety of extra-role behaviors described here as civic engagement. These activities are crucial in forming and sustaining social capital in society at large. Future research should probe these issues further and try to clarify the crucial roles of governmental institutions and public servants in creating social capital.

Some issues warrant further discussion, one of which is the overall predictive power of the equation and the causal relationships hypothesized. Much remains unexplained by this model. The level of civic participation existing at any one time is the result of a complex process that involves interactions with many variables, some of which have not been identified and explained in this or in previous research. Measurement is another concern of this research. Although robust, the measures used in this study do not tap every dimension of civic mindedness, and they do not include all types of civic participation. Future research could address these issues as well.

Appendix
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Between Key Variables

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Social trust	16.16	3.02	1.00					
2. Social altruism	2.78	1.28	.19***	1.00				
3. Equality	19.46	4.74	.04	–.04	1.00			
4. Tolerance	26.67	4.84	.60***	.06*	.14***	1.00		
5. Humanitarianism	18.52	3.43	.15***	.21***	.32***	.12***	1.00	
6. Civic participation	10.13	9.97	.18***	.51***	.04	.02	.16***	1.00

Note: N = 1,528
***Significant at .001 level

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