

INEQUALITY, TRUST, AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

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This article examines why people violate rationality and take part in their communities, differentiating by types of participation, particularly political versus other, more communal types of participation. The authors argue that trust plays an important role in participation levels, but contrary to more traditional models, the causal relationship runs from trust to participation. In addition, the authors posit that trust is strongly affected by economic inequality. Using aggregated American state-level data for the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the authors present a series of two-stage least squares models on the effects of inequality and trust on participation, controlling for other related factors. Findings indicate that inequality is the strongest determinant of trust and that trust has a greater effect on communal participation than on political participation.

Keywords: trust; economic inequality; political participation; civic engagement; state politics; community

Participation in political and civic life has long been stratified by class in the United States (Burnham, 1967). Those with more resources are more likely to have their views represented by political leaders (Bartels, 2003; Verba, Schlozman, & Brady, 1995, p. 222). Income inequality in the United States has been growing during the past 4

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decades, perhaps exacerbating the participation gap between the rich and the poor (Brady, 2003). Compared to other nations, especially advanced industrial nations, the level of economic inequality has long been greater in the United States than elsewhere and the “link between income and participation is greater in the United States than in comparable democracies” (Burnham, 1967; Deininger & Squire, 1996). Participation is depressed in the United States because the poor opt out.

Yet civic life in the United States was heralded as ubiquitous by de Tocqueville (1945) in the mid-19th century. He attributed this widespread participation to a cooperative spirit, which he labeled “self-interest rightly understood” (pp. 122-123). A century later, Almond and Verba (1963, p. 285; Lane, 1959, pp. 163-164) remarked on the vitality of civic life in the United States and attributed such participation to “the belief that people are generally cooperative, trustworthy, and helpful”. Recent work on social capital has confirmed strong linkages between civic spirit and civic engagement (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Putnam, 2000). The civic spirit, the trust in other people, has waned from 58% in 1960 (the Civic Culture survey) to just 37% in 2002 (the General Social Survey; GSS), and most forms of civic engagement have also fallen (Putnam, 2000, chap. 3). The presumption is that people who do not trust others will be less likely to participate in civic life.

Greater equality and higher levels of trust are two pathways to participation. They are hardly the whole story, and they are not alternative accounts. Inequality may depress participation, either directly or indirectly, through its effects on trust. First, where inequality is higher, the poor may feel powerless. They will perceive that their views are not represented in the political system and they will opt out of civic engagement. Second, trust in others rests on a foundation of economic equality. When resources are distributed inequitably, people at the top and the bottom will not see each other as facing a shared fate. Therefore, they will have less reason to trust people of different backgrounds. Also, trust rests on a psychological foundation of optimism and control over one’s environment. Where inequality is high, people will be less likely to believe that the future looks bright, and they will have even fewer reasons to believe that they are the masters of their own fate. Inequality leads to lower levels of trust and thus may also have an indirect effect on civic participation. We shall examine the

linkages among inequality, trust, and civic engagement in this article at the level of the American states.

The participation measures we examine—volunteering, giving to charity, voting, signing petitions, and working for a political party—are all measures of individual political activities. Trust also inheres in individuals. So why do we focus on states? Our framework links trust to inequality, and inequality is a collective rather than individual phenomenon. Our theoretical framework crosses the individual and collective levels, and we follow Brady (2003) in examining the effects of inequality on participation at the state level.

The social capital and resources accounts of participation have largely been seen as alternative accounts of why people get involved in their communities. Americans “of all income brackets” have withdrawn from civic life, Putnam (2000, pp. 193-194) argues, so a changing economic structure cannot be the explanation for lower participation. On the other hand, Verba et al. (1995, p. 28, 352, and *passim*) abjure the traditional explanations in social capital (trust and sociability) and political psychology (efficacy) in favor of skills learned in school, on the job, or in houses of worship. Our mission is to link a key concern in many discussions of social capital (trust) with economic inequality (resources) and to show that they are complementary rather than competing explanations.

For these five forms of participation, we seek to determine the direct and indirect effects of inequality and the possible reciprocal linkage between trust and civic engagement. There are strong reasons to believe that high levels of inequality depress civic participation. We know that the poor participate less, but a large gap between the rich and the poor may be just as important a depressor of participation as income levels (discussed below; Oliver, 1999).

Inequality also has a critical, indirect effect—working to reduce levels of trust. Both over time in the United States and cross-nationally, the level of economic inequality is the strongest predictor of trust (Uslaner, 2002, chaps. 6, 8). Economic inequality leads to less trust in two ways. First, high levels of inequality lead to less optimism for the future. Greater pessimism means less trust. Second, where there is a lot of inequality, people in different economic strata will be less likely to have a sense of shared fate. They will be less likely to trust one another. If trust does lead to greater participation, then we might find

indirect effects of inequality as well: High inequality results in lower levels of trust, which in turn leads to lower levels of civic engagement.

Trust is a sentiment linking us to other people, to work cooperatively with them on common projects (Putnam, 1993, pp. 170-171). We see generalized trust as a moral idea linking us to strangers, to people who may be different from ourselves. It is largely not based on our experiences as an adult, especially our participation in most civic and political life. So we do not expect the experiences of political or civic engagement to shape trust, although we acknowledge that others have posited such a linkage and recognize that it is important to test for this connection here.

Instead, generalized trust rests on a world view stressing optimism and a sense of control: The world is a good place, it is going to get better, and you can make it better. Religious fundamentalists and racists are classic examples of people who are particularized trusters, who only place faith in people of their own kind rather than people in general. This distinction is similar to Putnam's (2000, p. 22) concepts of *bridging* (generalized) and *bonding* (particularized) social capital, although the distinction precedes him (Yamigishi & Yamigishi, 1994) and is more pointed. Particularized trust is in-group trust at the expense of out-group trust, whereas bridging and bonding social capital do not preclude each other.

The standard trust question, "Generally speaking, do you believe that most people can be trusted, or can you not be too careful in dealing with people?" means faith in people we do not know, and it also reflects a generalized world view rather than specific experiences (Uslaner, 2002, chap. 3).

We shall estimate two-stage least squares models that will allow us to examine the linkages among inequality, trust, and civic engagement. Our participation measures are (a) turnout in all Presidential elections from 1972 to 1996, (b) working for political parties, (c) signing petitions, (d) donating to charity, and (e) volunteering time.

Overall, we find very limited support for the standard social capital thesis. Trust does not shape political participation at all. It does affect the communal activities of volunteering time and donating to charity. And there is sparse evidence that civic engagement in any realm leads to higher levels of trust. It is perhaps surprising that we find little support for a direct effect of inequality on any form of either political or

communal participation, but there is an indirect link (through trust) on charitable donations and volunteering.

TRUST AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

The contemporary literature on social capital and older arguments on political behavior have linked trust and civic engagement. Almond and Verba (1963) argued 4 decades ago that

in the United States and Britain, the belief that people are generally cooperative, trustworthy, and helpful is frequent, and it has political consequences. Belief in the benignity of one's fellow citizen is directly related to one's propensity to join with others in political activity. (p. 285)

The social capital literature often presumes that civic engagement not only stems from trust (Stolle, 1998) but also can lead to greater trust. As Putnam (2000, p. 137) argues, "The causal arrows among civic involvement, reciprocity, honesty, and social trust are as tangled as well-tossed spaghetti." Brehm and Rahn (1997) argue that the causal chain from civic engagement to trust is stronger than the connection from cooperative attitudes to participation. But theirs is one of the very few studies to show such a linkage, and there are good reasons to doubt this causal chain.

Rosenblum (1998) issues what may be the sharpest theoretical challenge:

There is the tendency to adopt a simplistic "transmission belt" model of civil society, which says that the beneficial formative effects of association spill over from one sphere to another. . . . The "transmission belt" model is simplistic as a general dynamic. It is one thing to say that within face-to-face rotating credit associations social networks allow trust to become transitive and spread: trust you, because I trust her and she assures me that she trusts you," and quite another thing to show that habits of trust cultivated in one social sphere are exhibited in incongruent groups in separate spheres. (p. 48)

Oliver (2001) is even more dismissive:

Despite the popularity and appeal of Tocqueville's and Putnam's arguments, the notion that civic participation holds all sorts of benefits arises largely from the observations and speculations of political theorists. (p. 199)

Groups based on common interests, such as bowling leagues, choral societies, and the like, are composed of people who are very much similar to each other. You do not need trust to get people involved in such groups. Particularized trusters, people who have faith only in their own kind, are more likely to get involved in civic life, but only with people similar to themselves (Uslaner, 2001; Wuthnow, 1999). Stolle (2000, p. 233) argues that civic groups amount to private social capital, providing benefits only to members that "are not universal and cannot be generalized to other settings." Her study of group members in the United States, Sweden, and Germany found that long-term participation in a voluntary association led to more trust of fellow members (particularized trust) but no sustained increase in generalized trust (Claibourne & Martin, 2000; Oliver, 2001, p. 201; Uslaner, 2002, chap. 5). People who join groups are not more likely to discuss civic affairs (Mondak & Mutz, 1997), so they may not forge enough common ground with others to generate trust at all. And when people do discuss civic affairs, they talk to people who already agree with them, mostly family members (Bennett, Flickinger, & Rhine, 2000).

Most people spend minuscule amounts of time in voluntary organizations, and even the most committed activists rarely devote more than a few hours a week to group life—hardly enough time to shape, or reshape, an adult's values such as trust (Newton, 1997, p. 579). People join groups too late in life to shape their fundamental disposition. There is evidence linking civic engagement to trust and connecting trust (Stolle, 1998) to participation, but most studies fail to find a significant connection.

Even as we are skeptical of this linkage (see below), it is important to test for reciprocal effects.

THE MODES OF PARTICIPATION

The social capital literature largely treats all forms of participation as similar. Putnam's (2000) account of declining engagement encompasses political involvement (voting and working for political parties), civic group membership, and informal socializing (including going to bars, attending religious services, attending dinner parties, going on picnics)—and he treats them all as part of a common syndrome of a waning civic spirit. Yet all civic engagement is not alike, and trust should not work the same way (if at all) across different forms of participation. There is little reason to believe that trust should affect all forms of civic engagement equally, or even at all—just as Verba, Schlozman, and Brady (1995) show that differences in resources shape some forms of political participation (giving money, writing letters) more than others (volunteering time, voting).

Verba and Nie (1972, pp. 52-53, 62) argue that campaign activity is a different form of civic engagement than cooperative efforts at improving your community. Although there is a moderate ($r = .52$) correlation between campaigning and communal activity, substantial numbers of Americans participate in only one or the other type of activity. Keeter, Zukin, Andolia, and Jenkins (2002, pp. 24-25) find that young Americans (ages 15 to 25) tend to specialize in either electoral activities or civic endeavors. Since Verba and Nie wrote, Americans (at least younger ones) seem to be separating the worlds of political and civic engagement more sharply. They focus on either community-building or party-building actions, but not both. Only 11% of young people qualified as dual activists in both realms (Keeter et al., 2002, p. 25).

Political and communal activities have different roots. The forms of civic engagement that we examine here—charitable donations and volunteering time included in the civic activities index of Keeter et al. (2002)—lead people to reach out to people who are different from themselves. They reflect the belief in the shared fate of a larger community that inheres in the notion of generalized trust (Mansbridge, 1999; Uslaner, 2002, p. 18). This sense of a shared fate and common identity leads trusting people to remedy what they see as society's ills, as reflected in the Jewish commandment of *tikkun olam*, "to repair of the world." Volunteering time and giving to charity—such activities

depend on trust and can build up faith in others in turn. Doing good deeds may lead to a warm glow, a positive feeling about yourself from doing good for others (Andreoni, 1989).

Political engagement exhibits the opposite motivation and stems from very different motivations. Political life is inherently confrontational. The goal of politics is to win, to defeat the opposition, and has become even more so in this era of heightened partisanship and loud voices. Whereas civic engagement depends on trust, political action thrives on mistrust (Warren, 1996). People will be more likely to get involved in political life when they get mad and believe that some others, be they other people or political leaders, cannot be trusted. When people are upset, they are more likely to take direct action in their communities (Dahl, 1961, pp. 192-199; Scott, 1985, pp. 44-45) and give money to their favored causes (Hansen, 1985). Giving to charity and volunteering time are likely to put people in contact (even if indirect) with people who are different from themselves, thus reaching out to out-groups. Attending a political meeting reinforces in-group loyalty and is likely to denigrate, if not demonize, the opposition.

The spirit of cooperation that underlies generalized trust is absent in political activity, which reinforces particularized trust at the expense of generalized trust. Voting is a less communal form of activity. We hear cries that abandoning the polling place will harm our civic spirit, but anyone who has voted more than once will clearly realize that casting a ballot is more likely to involve fights about parking spaces than exercises in community building. To the extent that our politics has become more polarized, the simple act of voting may also contribute to fostering in-group loyalties rather than a sense of belonging to the larger society. Signing petitions is only marginally different. The fleeting seconds that it takes to put one's name on a petition are hardly sufficient to establish any sort of civic community, much less to create the bonds leading to trust. If you are presented with the petition by someone in your social network, you will experience in-group bonding rather than out-group bridging. There is scant room for the spirit of cooperation underlying generalized trust to operate in political action. We would thus expect either a negative relationship between trust and political participation, or perhaps none at all.

We focus here only on civic and political activities and not on the more familiar group involvement indicators—memberships in volun-

tary associations—in the social capital literature. We have developed state-level measures of group membership and estimated similar models. We can only focus on so much here, but we briefly note that, as political activities neither produce (lead to) nor consume (depend on) trust, neither do group memberships. Our logic below applies to most forms of participation. Communal activities stand out as distinctive. And this is what our conception of trust is all about.

INEQUALITY AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

From the earliest studies of participation onward, we know that wealthy, more highly educated people take a greater role in civic life. They have greater stakes in what government does. They understand political and social life better. They are more likely to be interested in politics, to know whom to contact, and perhaps most critically, to know how to make their voices known (Bartels, 2003; Verba et al., 1995). And some forms of civic engagement are more demanding than others: Voting requires far less effort and knowledge than contacting public officials, running for office, or even working with others on a community project. Economic inequality (or more generally, resources) does not depress all forms of engagement in the same way (Verba & Nie, 1972). The rich may donate more money the poor, but those with fewer resources are “more likely to give of their time” (Verba et al., 1995, p. 192).

Most of what we think we know about participation and economic inequality is not really about inequality at all, but about resources. Resources are properties of individuals. Inequality is a relative concept—some people have more than others. It is based on income, but is not the same as income. To argue that some people have higher incomes than others says little about the level of income inequality. The claim that rich people participate more in civic life than poor people is not the same thing as saying that participation will be higher when there is more equality. Although income is a property of individuals and inequality is a collective property, one cannot move from one level of measurement to the other so readily.

The direct effect of inequality on participation arises when inequality of resources leads people in lower economic brackets to refrain

from participating, either because they have fewer resources or because they believe that getting involved will be fruitless because the system is stacked against them. Where inequality is high, those people with fewer resources may feel powerless. The indirect effect comes through the impact of inequality on trust. Higher levels of inequality mean less trust, and this may in turn reduce the level of civic engagement.

As with trust, we expect that inequality's effects on civic and political participation will vary according to the arena of engagement. The direct effect will be strongest in arenas that demand the most effort. Voting does not require much effort, nor does signing a petition. We expect that inequality would have less of an effect on these political participation measures than on working for a political party. However, we expect both giving to charity and volunteering time to have stronger connections to trust than any of the political measures. So we expect to find an indirect effect on volunteering time through the impact of inequality on trust.

There are several studies that examine the aggregate links, at either the state or community level (or sometimes using multilevel analyses) between trust and inequality on civic participation. None puts the link from inequality to trust and then to participation in context. Kawachi, Kennedy, Lochner, and Prothrow-Stith (1997, p. 1494) use state-level aggregated data to show that "inequality was also associated with lack of social trust" (although, curiously, they did not use the trust question, but rather one on fairness). They also report "a strong inverse relationship between inequality and group membership" (although the simple correlation is only $-.40$; p. 1494). They make no linkage between trust and participation. They also report modest effects of state-level income inequality on individual-level turnout rates in a single-equation logit analysis, controlling only for other demographic factors (Blakely, Kennedy, & Kawachi, 2001). Oliver's multilevel analysis (1999) finds that income diversity (not necessarily the same as inequality) leads to higher levels of attending meetings of community organizations, but economic homogeneity depresses participation in many areas because it leads to less interest in politics. Alesina and LaFerrara (2000) find that communities with higher levels of income inequality have lower participation rates in half of the civic groups they analyze in the GSS. So there are fragments pointing to

linkages from inequality to trust to lower participation, but there is no comprehensive test of the model we propose.

Knack and Keefer (1997) have argued that trust leads to greater inequality rather than the other way around, and this suggests that there might be a reciprocal relationship between trust and inequality. Allowing for simultaneity between trust and inequality would give an extra equation for each of the five measures of participation we examine (raising the total from 10 to 15), so we followed the estimations of Uslaner (2002, chaps. 6, 8) both over time in the United States and cross-nationally. He showed that inequality shaped trust, but that the linkage from trust to inequality was not significant in any of the estimations. However, trust does lead to greater support for programs of economic redistribution, which in turn lead to greater economic inequality; there is an indirect linkage from trust to inequality. But this would lead us further afield—with estimations for trust, inequality, participation, and policy measures—to try to untangle the connections.

We present our general model of trust, inequality, and participation in Figure 1. Note that we posit a direct effect of trust on civic engagement in the figure, even although we expect this linkage to hold only for communal activities (giving time and money). We also draw a dotted line in the figure for a reciprocal linkage between participation and trust. We may see evidence of such a connection for communal activities, but not for political activities.

DATA AND METHOD

Our data combine surveys and aggregate data.¹ We look at data on the states for two reasons: (a) As noted above, inequality is an aggregate measure, not a trait of individuals, and (b) many of the measures of participation and trust come from different surveys and thus cannot be linked directly in individual-level analyses. We might in principle aggregate some of the measures to different levels (e.g., the county), but local codes are not available in many surveys; even when they are, the sample sizes would be too small to produce reliable estimates.

We aggregate survey results to the state level. We employ a wide variety of surveys to estimate state-level measures of trust and other social psychological variables. These surveys were not designed to

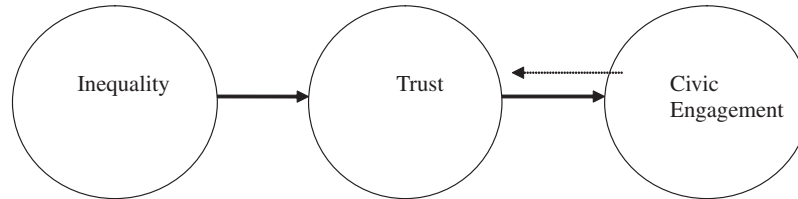


Figure 1: The Relationship Among Trust, Inequality, and Civic Engagement

produce state-level measurements. The primary sampling units are not states. Nevertheless, aggregating surveys generally does produce reliable results. Putnam (2000) aggregates GSS data to the state level to produce estimates of social capital measures; Brace et al. **PLEASE PROVIDE REFERENCE** (2002) provide validation of this method of aggregation (Brady, 2003; Blakely et al., 2001), comparing estimated state opinions with public policies and other aggregate indicators using GSS data. We use a much broader range of surveys than the GSS in an attempt to get the most reasonable estimates for each state. We aggregate the survey data to the state level by decade.² To maximize the number of cases, our models include observations for the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, where data are available (so our maximum number of cases is 50×3 , or 150). The charitable giving and volunteering estimates are available only for the 1990s.

We faced a trade-off in obtaining any data points for some smaller states and unreliable estimates. We chose an arbitrary minimum sample size of 50 respondents (although the vast majority of cases had far more observations than that). If we found observations that were outliers or that had values that seemed unusual, we checked one decade's estimates against those for other decades, and, when necessary, deleted aberrant cases.³ Overall, we believe that we have minimized errors in the aggregated survey data and have confidence in our estimates. For some other surveys we employ, such as the Roper Social and Political Trends Archive, aggregation is less problematic because of the large number of observations in each annual survey.

Alesina and LaFerrara (2000, 2001) and Oliver (1999) integrate individual and aggregate variables in ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions, but OLS is not well suited to multilevel estimation.

Where there are measures of trust and participation in the same survey (as with turnout, volunteering, and charitable donations), we considered multilevel modeling through the estimation technique of HLM. However, HLM requires at least 150 cases for each sampling unit and few states have enough respondents to meet this condition. We estimated some models but lost so many cases (states) that we regard the results as unreliable. We have estimates of trust for 41 states, but the HLM model we estimated included only 15 states. Thus, we focus on aggregate models.

Our variables come from a variety of sources. For participation, we use U.S. Census Bureau estimates of turnout for presidential elections in 1972, 1976, 1980, 1984, 1988, 1992, and 1996, averaged by decade.⁴ For signing petitions and working for a political party, we use the Roper Social and Political Trends data set. Roper surveyed more than 400,000 people in polls conducted 10 times a year from 1973 to 1994. Although the sampling unit was not the state, Brady (2003) has shown that aggregating these data to the state level is justifiable. We derive state-level estimates of these activities by decade. Our two communal measures, charitable donations and volunteering, are available only for the 1990s in a variety of surveys.⁵ Our survey-based volunteering measure is correlated at .780 with a U.S. Census Bureau survey of volunteering reported in Jennings and Patrick Haist (2002).⁶

Our measure of trust is an aggregate (by decade) from a variety of surveys, mostly the GSS and the American National Election Studies.³ We use only the standard trust question. Two other questions often used in a misanthropy scale ask whether people are fair or helpful (Rosenberg, 1956). Putnam (2000, chap. 8) uses a survey-based measure of honesty as a surrogate for trust. Whereas fairness and helpfulness generally scale with trust, their trends are very different, as are their consequences. Honesty does not correlate as strongly at the individual level, so aggregation is even more hazardous (Uslaner, 2002, pp. 68-74).

We shall estimate equations for both trust and the five measures of civic and political participation. To test for reciprocal causation between trust and civic engagement, we employ two-stage least squares. The equation for trust will include economic inequality (state-level Gini indices by decade, provided by the U.S. Census Bureau) so we can determine whether there is an indirect effect of

inequality on engagement as well as direct effects. The Gini index is a measure of the distribution of wealth across a society. Other measures of inequality, such as the poverty rate and the gap between the richest and poorest deciles, are not so comprehensive. Because our concept of trust is based on the idea of a shared fate across all segments of society, the Gini index seems the most appropriate measure of inequality (it is also the only one available for the states over time). Each equation for participation will include both trust and inequality and more specific predictors posited to shape each form of engagement. For both the trust and participation models, we include fixed effects for decades (1980 and 1990) to control for omitted variables (and time trends).

Our models for trust follow those Uslaner (2002, chap. 4) estimated at the individual level for trust. The trust equation includes measures of optimism and control as well as particularized trust and economic inequality. This equation focuses on the factors, largely social psychological, that lead to a cooperative world view. The participation equations include trust and inequality, but each is based on literature on political and communal participation. The equation for trust is identical across all five estimations. The participation equations are identical for each of the three political participation measures and include mobilizing agents (unions and houses of worship) as well as demographics (education levels) and aggregate measures of external political efficacy (government pays attention to citizens and government is run by a few big interests). Because we believe that communal activities reflect different patterns of participation from political actions, we employ different predictors: For volunteering, we use measures of free time and how one uses leisure time (television viewing) and measures of community leadership. For charitable giving, we use state-level per capita income and church membership.⁷

We aggregated indicators of optimism and control, which were the most important determinants of trust at the individual level: (a) whether the lot of the average person is getting better or worse (from the GSS ANOMIA5 measure), (b) whether people get ahead in life by hard work or luck (also from the GSS), and (c) an overall measure of financial satisfaction (GSS). We also include in our trust model an indicator of particularized as opposed to generalized trust: the share of religious fundamentalists in a state who attend church regularly (from the GSS, aggregated by state). Fundamentalists are likely only to trust

their own kind and not to trust people who are different from themselves (Uslaner, 2002, chaps. 2, 4). This measure places religious liberals who attend services regularly at one end of the scale and fundamentalists who are regular attendees at the other. The logic here is that liberal religious denominations have been at the forefront of reaching out to others, to forming ecumenical coalitions in such movements as civil rights, whereas fundamentalists do not reach out to others.⁸ Finally, education is consistently among the strongest predictors of trust, so we include this in the model.

ASSESSING THE MODELS

Because we have five forms of civic engagement, we have five sets of parameter estimates for trust.⁹ Overall, each of the predictors of trust (excluding measures of civic engagement) is significant in all five estimates, with the exception of economic inequality and whether the lot of the average person is getting worse in the turnout equation. Optimism, control, and high levels of education are associated with greater trusting and fundamentalism with less faith in strangers, consistent with the individual-level results in Uslaner (2002, chap. 4). In each equation except for charitable giving (discussed below), the level of economic inequality in a state leads to lower levels of trust. There is strong support for the first link in our causal chain. Education is a consistently powerful predictor of trust, as are, to varying degrees, the estimates for optimism (the lot of the average person is getting worse, and financial satisfaction) as well as control: There are high levels of trusters where most people believe that they can get ahead by their own hard work rather than luck or connections. States with high levels of fundamentalists who attend church regularly have lower levels of trust in all models.

We present the results for political participation in Table 1. Our model for trust fares well across all three specifications in this table (and those for communal activity as well in Table 2). Most critically, states with higher levels of economic inequality have fewer trusters. States where the populations are optimistic—where large numbers of people disagree that the lot of the average person is getting worse and

(text continues on p. #)

TABLE 1
Political Participation and Trust

| <i>Dependent Variable</i> | <i>Turnout</i> | | <i>Political Meetings</i> | | <i>Petitions</i> | |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
| | <i>Trust</i> | | <i>Trust</i> | | <i>Trust</i> | |
| | <i>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</i> | <i>SE</i> |
| Political participation | -0.000 | 0.000 | 0.343 | 0.505 | 0.262* | 0.186 |
| | KEEP NEGATIVE SIGN? | | | | | |
| Gini | -1.729*** | 0.301 | -1.977*** | 0.299 | -1.089** | 0.529 |
| Lot of average person gets worse | -0.315*** | 0.098 | -0.329*** | 0.299 | -0.318** | 0.118 |
| Get ahead by luck | -0.191** | 0.069 | -0.187** | 0.069 | -0.075 | 0.110 |
| Financial satisfaction | 0.264** | 0.085 | 0.258** | 0.086 | 0.295** | 0.0114 |
| Fundamentalism | -0.014** | 0.004 | -0.127*** | 0.004 | -0.011** | 0.004 |
| Education | 0.0356*** | 0.007 | 0.035*** | 0.007 | 0.021** | 0.009 |
| Constant | 1.623*** | 0.168 | 1.365*** | 0.387 | 1.359*** | 0.240 |

| Dependent Variable | Turnout | | Political Meetings | | Petitions | |
|---------------------------------|---|---------|---|-------|---|-------|
| | Unstandardized Regression Coefficient | SE | Unstandardized Regression Coefficient | SE | Unstandardized Regression Coefficient | SE |
| Trust | -6.233 | 35.273 | -0.132 | 0.088 | 0.448* | 0.278 |
| Gini | -5.757 | 125.584 | 0.243 | 0.311 | -1.061 | 0.928 |
| Government pays attention | 79.311*** | 17.310 | -0.112** | 0.042 | 0.089 | 0.130 |
| Labor union | 69.504** | 27.704 | 0.0503 | 0.067 | 0.323* | 0.233 |
| Attendance at services | 26.199*** | 2.899 | 0.009 | 0.007 | -0.0205 | 0.022 |
| Education | -2.663 | 2.429 | 0.008* | 0.006 | 0.017 | 0.019 |
| Government run by few interests | 76.687** | 24.870 | -0.140** | 0.016 | 0.366* | 0.226 |
| Constant | -44.359 | 6.941 | 1.119*** | 0.149 | -0.199 | 0.477 |
| <i>n</i> | 102 | | 102 | | 93 | |
| Participation R^2 | .724 | | .179 | | .453 | |
| Trust R^2 | .747 | | .745 | | .771 | |

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

TABLE 2
Other Types of Civic Engagement and Trust, 1990s

| <i>Dependent Variable</i> | <i>Volunteering</i> | | <i>Trust</i> | | <i>Charitable Giving</i> | |
|----------------------------------|--|-----------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
| | <i>Trust</i> | | <i>Trust</i> | | <i>Trust</i> | |
| | <i>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</i> | <i>SE</i> |
| Participation | -0.124 | 0.202 | 0.459 | 0.754 | 0.459 | 0.754 |
| Gini | -20.015** | 0.610 | -10.264 | 10.143 | -10.264 | 10.143 |
| Lot of average person gets worse | -0.300** | 0.124 | -0.267** | 0.116 | -0.267** | 0.116 |
| Get ahead by luck | -0.361** | 0.005 | -0.278** | 0.112 | -0.278** | 0.112 |
| Financial satisfaction | 0.245** | 0.111 | 0.073 | 0.145 | 0.073 | 0.145 |
| Fundamentalism | -0.027*** | 0.005 | -0.020*** | 0.006 | -0.020*** | 0.006 |
| Education | 0.051*** | 0.011 | 0.051* | 0.035 | 0.051* | 0.035 |
| Constant | 10.821*** | 0.482 | 0.584 | 0.719 | 0.584 | 0.719 |

| <i>Dependent Variable</i> | <i>Volunteering</i> | | <i>Charity, 1990s</i> | |
|---------------------------|--|-----------|--|-----------|
| | <i>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</i> | <i>SE</i> | <i>Unstandardized Regression Coefficient</i> | <i>SE</i> |
| Trust | 0.625*** | 0.178 | 0.394*** | 0.107 |
| Gini | 0.701 | 0.673 | -0.492 | 0.480 |
| Hours watching TV | -0.015 | 0.036 | — | — |
| Spend time | -0.255** | 0.112 | — | — |
| Influence | -0.327*** | 0.079 | — | — |
| Leadership | 0.201** | 0.079 | — | — |
| Income | — | — | 0.00002 | 0.0002 |
| Church membership | — | — | -0.023* | 0.015 |
| Constant | 10.183** | 0.619 | 0.797*** | 0.234 |
| <i>n</i> | 41 | | 37 | |
| Trust R^2 | .809 | | .8812 | |
| Participation R^2 | .639 | | .5548 | |

* $p < .10$. ** $p < .05$. *** $p < .001$.

that you need luck or connections to get ahead or where people are satisfied with their financial situation—have larger shares of trusters. States with larger shares of active fundamentalists (who attend church regularly) have lower levels of trust. And higher levels of education lead to greater trust.¹⁰

There is little support for the argument that political action depends on trust or that it leads to more trusting citizenries. Turnout rates and political meeting attendance do not depend on trust. Signing a petition is barely related to trust, with the coefficient significant at $p < .1$. And there is scant evidence that political participation builds trust either: Only signing a petition even marginally (also at $p < .10$) affects trust. The logic as to how sporadic activity such as signing a petition can lead to trust in strangers is unclear, and this result is likely a fluke of aggregation or specification.

None of the three measures of political participation are shaped by economic inequality. The lack of significant coefficients from trust rule out an indirect effect as well. This might seem surprising because political participation is widely believed to be stratified by income, status, and resources (Verba et al., 1995). Yet there is evidence that inequality in political participation has been decreasing from the 1970s to the 1990s. Brady (2003) finds lower levels of participatory inequality using the same Roper Political and Social Trends data set we employ, even as economic inequality has been increasing.

Turnout levels are more strongly shaped by union membership (mobilization) and political efficacy as well as levels of attendance at religious services. Attendance at political meetings is strongest in states where people believe that government is not responsive to them, whereas responsiveness and mobilization seem to drive (at the aggregate level) signing of petitions.

We have found very limited support for any of the predictions we have made for any of the political participation measures. The only part of our model that has received unambiguous support is the aggregate model for trust. Our political participation measures thus do not depend on either trust or inequality.

TRUST, INEQUALITY, AND COMMUNAL ACTIVITIES

Table 2 lays out our estimations of the relationships between trust, inequality, and volunteering and charitable giving. Once again, our models for trust largely conform to our expectations. The only major exception is the lack of a significant relationship between trust and economic inequality in one equation (charitable giving).

For our communal participation measures, aggregate trust is the strongest predictor of the share of people in a state who give their time in volunteering or donate to charity. We see no direct effects for economic inequality, but there is an indirect path for volunteering: In the volunteering equations, the level of economic inequality is a strong predictor of trust. High levels of inequality lead to less trust and in turn lower rates of giving time. We do not see this same dynamic for charitable giving. But in both cases, trust matters mightily.

Volunteering also depends on people's self-perceptions. In states where a large number of people say that they are leaders in their communities and where many believe that they are leaders in the community, levels of volunteering are higher. States where people have much free time also have higher levels of volunteering, but states where people spend more time watching television do not have lower levels of giving time. We considered a range of possible predictors for charitable donations, but none other than trust levels proved significant (not even church affiliation). Perhaps the sources of charitable giving are so widespread that it is difficult to tease out motivations, especially in an aggregate analysis. The powerful impact of trust suggests that it is central to good deeds. We find no corresponding reciprocal effect in the aggregate models for communal activities on trust. These models suggest a one-way pattern of influence from trust to good works, perhaps shaped by the influence of inequality on faith in others.

More inequality leads to less trust and less caring for people who are different from oneself. Where there is less trust, there are fewer acts of kindness toward others. We do not see the same impact on political engagement because the effects of trust on political participation are far smaller than those of faith in others on charitable donations and volunteering.

Trust is a significant predictor of volunteering and charitable giving, but its effects on political participation are weaker. We did not expect to find significant effects for political activities. It is thus not surprising to find different determinants of the two forms of engagement.

REPRISE

We have set forth four main hypotheses. First, inequality will lead to less trust. Second, inequality's effects on participation come largely through trust rather than directly to participation. Third, trust will have greater effects on communal types of civic engagement than on political engagement. Fourth, there is less likely to be an effect from civic engagement to trust than from trust to civic engagement. Each of these hypotheses fare well, although two require some qualifications.

Our findings indicate that inequality has a dampening effect on generalized trust. Inequality is a significant determinant of trust in four of the five models. This provides additional support for the linkage found over time in the United States and cross-nationally (Uslaner, 2002, chaps. 6, 8) and for communities (Alesina & LaFerrara, 2001). Second, we have found no evidence of a direct effect of economic inequality on civic engagement. Inequality has an indirect effect only for volunteering. There is auxiliary evidence that inequality shapes charitable giving: The insignificant coefficient in our model clearly stems from collinearity with the other predictors (especially the level of education in the trust model). Alternative models yield either a direct or indirect effect of inequality on charitable giving—but in each case, the more inequality, the smaller the share of a state's population that gives money. This is as we would expect if inequality were driving trust down but not as we would expect if people were donating to good causes on the basis of need.

The poor do participate less in political affairs, but the skew in participation has not increased as income inequality has grown (Brady, 2003; Leighley & Nagler, 1992). Levels of inequality are unrelated to state-level measures of efficacy. The poor may participate less, but this analysis does not show either a direct or indirect effect of inequality on participation.

We can see four explanations for these perhaps surprising findings: (a) Inequality might lead to mobilization of the poor if there is strong leadership (Fong, 2001), (b) inequality might demobilize African Americans rather than Whites (although simple zero-order correlations for Black and White political participation with inequality do not support this thesis), (c) inequality's most important consequence may be in its effects on depressing trust and political cooperation, and (d) the relationship between a participatory skew based on income and inequality is more complex than we imagined and we need a more complex specification. These accounts are not mutually exclusive and all may be true in varying proportions.

We found support for our argument that trust has a greater effect on communal participation than on political participation. We suggested that, contrary to much of the theoretical literature on trust and participation, the causal arrows are more likely to run from trust to civic engagement than from civic engagement to trust.

Because trust is more strongly linked to communal than to political participation, rising income inequality seems more critical to our fraying social fabric than to declining political participation. Because minority participation in politics is increasing, looking to inequality to explain levels of political participation may be less realistic now. Because our torn social fabric clearly spills over to our politics—making political parties more polarized (Uslaner, 2000 **PLEASE PROVIDE THIS 2000 REFERENCE, OR IS IT FOR 2001, 2002, 2004, OR IN PRESS?**) and making it more difficult to obtain compromises on legislation (Uslaner, 2002, chap. 7)—we must not dismiss the impact of inequality on our political life.

Inequality also leads to a bias in whose voices get heard in political life, even if the effects of inequality on participation are smaller than in the past (Bartels, 2003; Verba et al., 1995, p. 506). Beyond charitable giving and volunteering, trust also has important consequences not considered here: It leads to greater tolerance, to support for programs to aid minorities and the poor, to the implementation of such policies through redistribution and spending on education, and to policy outcomes that make minorities better off (Uslaner, 2002, chaps. 7, 8; 2004). It is important, however, to get the story right as to what causes what, and there is meager evidence that economic inequality is

the cause of variations in participation and that trust is the magic elixir for civic engagement.

These models confirm the argument in Uslaner (2002, chap. 5) that trust and participation are largely independent of each other. But they do not focus on other aspects of Putnam's argument about social capital: membership in civic groups and informal social connections. Preliminary analysis suggests that most of these indicators of civic engagement and social connections are also unrelated to trust and inequality, but this is an issue beyond the scope of this article. For now, we have additional evidence that the impact of inequality on engagement occurs largely through trust, when it happens at all.

The connections among trust, inequality, and participation are likely more complex than the simple causal chain posited here. Uslaner (2004) shows that states with higher levels of trust have policies that lead to greater racial equality in policy outcomes (such as education suspension ratios for Whites and African Americans, poverty and infant mortality rates, learning disabilities, and the like). Inequality is also a strong determinant of more demanding forms of political participation (making speeches, writing to public officials, working for political parties, serving as an officer in organizations) for African Americans, whereas trust is important for Whites for similar activities. This is a first step in examining these connections, and it seems that the ties between trust and participation are not as straightforward as some social capital theorists have posited.

NOTES

1. We are grateful to Arthur Jones, Jr., of the United States Census Bureau for providing us with the state-level Gini indices and to Ben Highton of the University of California, Davis, for turnout data in the United States (obtained from Census data). We have also benefited greatly from the *State Policy and Politics Quarterly* data resource Web site, <http://www.unl.edu/SPPQ/datasets.html>.

2. The time series effects of the decades in the pooled data are controlled for with comparison models using generalized two-stage least squares random-effects regression. The results of these models (not shown in this article) are very similar to those of the two-stage least square regression reported in Tables 1 and 2. The three decades were pooled not just to increase statistical power but also because we realized that the relationships were largely similar during the three decades. As a result, the hypothesized relationships concerning changing inequality during the three decades did not hold.

3. Fengshi Wu helped with the data aggregation at the beginning of the project. We used the following surveys for generating the trust estimates: the General Social Survey (GSS; 1972, 1973, 1975, 1976, 1978, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1986, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1990, 1991, 1993, 1994, 1996, and 1998), American National Election Study (1972, 1974, 1976, 1992, 1996, and 1998), the *Washington Post* Trust in Government survey (1995), the Pew Civic Engagement survey (1997), the *New York Times* Millennium survey (1999), and the 1971 Quality of Life survey of the Survey Research Center, University of Michigan. We did not use the 1978 Quality of Life survey, nor the Jennings-Niemi socialization surveys, because the estimates of trust were much higher than those of other surveys, and we judged these estimates to be less reliable. Also, the World Values Surveys did not have state codes available. We are grateful to Robert Putnam and John Robinson for making the state codes for the GSS available to us. The handful of aberrant cases stemmed from easily identifiable outliers, such as a state in which almost all or almost none of the respondents believed that "the government is run by a few big interests." These cases, few in number, were clearly identifiable when looking at the distributions of the data and were the result of small and unrepresentative samples.

4. We are grateful to Ben Highton for providing us with these data.

5. Our measure of political meetings is aggregated from American National Election Studies (ANES). The petitions variable is aggregated from the Roper Survey from the Social and Political Trends Archive. The volunteering and charitable contribution estimates were aggregated from ANES, GSS, *Washington Post*, *New York Times*, and independent sector surveys.

6. We are grateful to Edward Jennings and Margaret Patrick for providing their data. The correlation increases to .851 when the outliers of Connecticut and Vermont are dropped.

7. The measures of influence in the community, leadership, and spare time are aggregate measures from the DDB Needham Life Style surveys. Hours watching television comes from the GSS, as does church membership.

8. One reviewer suggested that the GSS measure of fundamentalism may not be optimal given the critique of Steensland et al. (2000), who show that the 3-category measure (liberal, moderate, fundamentalist) is not monotonically related to many political and social values. This does not apply to generalized trust, however. We examined individual-level responses across the 1972 to 2002 GSS and found that 31.3% of fundamentalists agreed that most people can be trusted, compared to 45% of moderates and 48.9% of religious liberals. Fundamentalism is a reflection of particularized rather than generalized trust.

9. We could estimate a six-equation model, but that would be unwieldy and the parameter estimates would not be reliable.

10. A reviewer suggested that trust should depend on ethnic or racial fragmentation, as reported by Alesina and LaFerrara (2001). We tested for the effects of racial and ethnic diversity for a reduced sample (only the 1990s) using data provided by Rodney Hero and Richard F. Winters. Neither variable was significant. Uslaner (in press) argues that it is not ethnic or racial diversity that matters for trust, but rather the extent of ethnic segregation: Nations where ethnic minorities are segregated from the ethnic majority are less trusting. There is little opportunity for cross-group interaction and much opportunity for developing stronger in-group identity and social ties. We made an exhaustive search for state-level data on residential segregation but could not find these data aggregated to the state level. We are not ready to accept the linkage found by Alesina and LaFerrara because their models are very sparse.

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