

SOCIAL TRUST AND ATTITUDES TOWARD DEMOCRACY

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Abstract In spite of the great importance attached by social capital theory to the role of social trust in maintaining stable and effective democracy, research has produced rather weak and mixed support for the idea that the socially trusting individuals tend to be politically trusting, and the weight of evidence suggests either a weak or insignificant relationship between social and political trust. The present work, however, reports robust and statistically significant correlations between generalized social trust, on the one hand, and confidence in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy, on the other. The associations are significant in 23 European countries and in the United States. This article argues that its findings are more accurate and more reliable than much of the previous work because they are based on better and more sensitive measures. The results pose a dilemma for future survey work, while reopening possibilities for social capital research.

Social Trust and Politics

Social capital theory argues that generalized social trust is an important and central element in a complex and virtuous circle of social attitudes, behavior, and institutions that act as the foundation for stable and effective democratic government. Trust is said to sustain a cooperative social climate, to facilitate collective behavior, and to encourage a regard for the public interest. Trust

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between citizens makes it easier, less risky and more rewarding for them to participate in community and civic affairs, and helps to build the social institutions of civil society upon which peaceful, stable, and efficient democracy depends. Democracy and good government, in their turn, may then reinforce the conditions in which both social and political trust can flourish, enabling citizens to cooperate effectively in both private and public affairs. In other words, according to social capital theory social and political trust are closely associated and mutually supportive (see, among many others, Gambetta 1988; Dunn 1993; Putnam 1993, 2000; Muller and Seligson 1994; Inglehart 1997; Seligman 1997; Braithwaite and Levi 1998; Hollis 1998; Warren 1999; Sztompka 2000; Dekker and Uslander 2001; O'Neill 2002; Uslander 2002; Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Newton 2007).

The theory has *prima facie* plausibility and, as a basic proposition of political sociology that tries to link the social with the political, a great deal of potential theoretical power. Nevertheless, the claim that the socially trusting individuals are also politically trusting has poor empirical support. A good deal of individual-level survey research suggests that social and political trust are rather weakly correlated, if at all (Wright 1976, pp. 104–10; Craig 1993, p. 27; Orren 1997; Newton 1999, p. 180; Newton and Norris 2000, pp. 62–66; Uslander 2000–01, 2002; Rothstein 2002, pp. 320–21; Delhey and Newton 2003; Mishler and Rose 2005). Kaase (1999, p. 13), for example, concludes that “. . .the statistical relationship between interpersonal trust and political trust is small indeed.”¹

A smaller body of work, however, finds a robust association between social and political trust. Using the United States' General Social Survey data, 1975–94, Brehm and Rahn (1997) find significant partial correlations between interpersonal trust and confidence in government, holding constant 13 other variables. Similarly, significant and robust associations are reported by Jagodzinski and Manabe (2004), Zmerli, Newton, and Montero (2007), and Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal (2007). These results suggest that social and political trust may, indeed, be closely linked after all, as social capital theory claims. If so, it raises the question of why empirical research produces such different results, and which results are the more reliable.

In this paper, we examine the associations between generalized social trust, confidence in political institutions, and satisfaction with democracy, as previous work has done. It takes individuals as the unit of analysis, not whole countries. Rather than pooling individual data for the 24 countries in the study, it analyses the results by country in order to see if there are common cross-national patterns. This would strengthen the power of the findings, in

1. Cross-national and time series comparisons that do not take individuals but countries as their unit of analysis are more likely to find significant associations between their measures of social and political trust (Inglehart 1997; Knack and Keefer 1997; Newton and Norris 2000; Newton 2001; Paxton 2002; Uslander 2002, pp. 217–48; Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Delhey and Newton 2005; Newton 2006; Keele 2007), but this study is concerned only with individual-level analysis.

contrast with previous studies that have found weak and patchy associations and variability between countries.

This article partially replicates the earlier work of Zmerli, Newton, and Montero (2007), which was based on the Citizenship, Involvement, and Democracy (CID) study. However, it extends the analysis beyond the original work in several significant ways. First, while the CID survey covered 22,000 individuals in 13 nations, Wave 1 of the European Social Survey (ESS) (2002/03) covers some 40,000 individuals in 22 countries of West and Central Europe, and Israel. The ESS is widely regarded as the most reliable cross-national survey of its kind because of the rigor of its sampling methods, questionnaire design, translation, fieldwork, face-to-face interviewing, and pilot testing (see, for example, Kohler 2007a, 2007b). Second, it also adds exactly comparable data drawn from the American Citizenship, Involvement, and Democracy study (US CID).² As a result, the present work covers all the nations of West Europe and some in East Europe as well as Israel and the United States. Third, it uses a larger and broader range of control variables to subject the hypothesis of an association between social trust, political confidence, and satisfaction with democracy to more rigorous testing. Given the potential theoretical importance of finding a statistically significant and substantively strong association at the individual level between social trust and different measures of political support, it is worth replicating the earlier work but testing the results more rigorously and across a larger number and wider variety of countries.³

This paper is divided into two main parts:

1. An account of how social trust, confidence in institutions, and satisfaction with democracy are measured in this paper and how this differs from previous work. We elaborate the details of measurements and scores because these are central to the argument.
2. An analysis of the individual-level correlations between social trust and our measures of political support, and of how different measures produce different results.

Methods and Data

The ESS and US CID surveys asked three questions about generalized social trust.

2. The US CID data used in this article are exactly comparable with the ESS Wave 1 Module data, since both are based on the earlier European CID survey (see <http://www.mzes.uni-mannheim.de/projekte/cid/> and <http://www.uscidsurvey.org>).

3. In order to replicate the earlier Zmerli, Newton, and Montero study as precisely as possible, we divide the ESS data on Germany into East and West, so this study covers not 23 but 21 nations and the two Germanies. For the sake of brevity, we refer to 23 countries. To replicate as exactly as possible we also restrict the present study to respondents aged 18 and over, although the ESS survey covers all those aged 15 and over.

- “Using this card, generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” (For interviewers, an explanatory note was added to the term “careful.” “Can’t be too careful: need to be wary or always somewhat suspicious.”)
- “Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance or would they try to be fair?” (“Take advantage: exploit or cheat; fair: in the sense of treat appropriately and straightforwardly.”)
- “Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or are they mostly looking out for themselves?” (‘Helpful’: the intended contrast is between self-interest and altruistic helpfulness.)

The first question is the classic trust question devised by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann in Germany in 1948, to which Rosenberg (1956, 1957) added the other two questions to form a more reliable and valid trust scale. In the ESS and US CID surveys, respondents are given a card with an 11-point rating scale on which to place themselves. In much previous research on trust (e.g., World Values and Eurobarometer), respondents were offered a dichotomized “yes/no” option.

Principal component analysis of the three trust questions shows that they perform in the same way across all countries and scale well in all of them, yielding one single component explaining between 58 and 71 percent of the variance. This repeats previous findings for the Rosenberg scale (Rosenberg 1956, 1957; Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007) and indicates a single underlying dimension, as it was intended to do, that can be labeled “generalized social trust” (table 1).

Turning now to political trust, we follow the normal practice of distinguishing between trust in people and confidence in institutions (Luhmann 1979, p. 39; Giddens 1990, p. 114; Seligman 1997, pp. 16–22; Offe 1999, pp. 44–45; Hardin 2000, pp. 33–35) and use confidence in political institutions as our indicator of political support. This taps a more stable and bedrock set of attitudes than trust in particular political leaders, parties, or governments (Lipset and Schneider 1983; Gabriel 1995, p. 361; Listhaug and Wiberg 1995, pp. 299–302; Levi and Stoker 2000, pp. 484–85; Newton and Norris 2000, p. 53).

The ESS and US CID surveys ask a set of six questions about political confidence, four about national, and two about international institutions.

Please look at this card, and tell me for each item, how much confidence you have in them.

- Politicians
- Parliament
- Legal system
- Police
- European Parliament
- United Nations

Table 1. Principal Component Analysis of Three-Item Rosenberg Trust Scale

Country	General trust	Helpfulness	Fairness	Eigenvalue	Percentage of variance explained by single factor
Austria	.83	.82	.87	2.12	71
Belgium	.81	.74	.81	1.85	62
Czech Republic	.85	.77	.84	2.03	68
Denmark	.84	.72	.84	1.92	64
East Germany	.78	.77	.81	1.85	62
Finland	.82	.76	.83	1.93	64
France	.78	.73	.77	1.74	58
Greece	.83	.81	.84	2.04	68
Hungary	.83	.81	.83	2.04	68
Ireland	.81	.77	.85	1.97	66
Israel	.83	.73	.86	1.95	65
Italy	.81	.80	.84	2.00	67
Luxembourg	.79	.67	.81	1.74	58
The Netherlands	.83	.74	.84	1.95	65
Norway	.80	.67	.82	1.78	59
Poland	.78	.73	.79	1.77	59
Portugal	.85	.75	.82	1.96	65
Slovenia	.81	.78	.84	1.96	65
Spain	.85	.76	.84	2.00	67
Sweden	.86	.73	.83	1.87	62
Switzerland	.80	.72	.82	1.84	61
UK	.80	.78	.84	1.96	66
United States	.85	.79	.85	2.06	69
West Germany	.76	.77	.81	1.82	61

NOTE.—In this, and all subsequent tables, the figures are based on the weighted data required by the ESS sample design (and the US CID accordingly). The table reports all Eigenvalues with a value of more than 1.00.

As with the social trust questions, respondents were asked to place themselves on an 11-point rating scale, compared with the World Values and Eurobarometer surveys, which use a 4-point scale.

Principal component analysis of responses to the six questions produces a single component in 22 out of the 24 countries that explains 51–65 percent of the variance (table 2). This repeats the results of earlier work on East and West Europe (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995; Mishler and Rose 1997; Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007), and shows that the questions scale well. In Austria and Israel two components are extracted, one loading on domestic and the other on international institutions, but even in these cases fixing on a one-component solution produces a satisfactory statistical result.

Table 2. Principal Component Analysis of Confidence in Political Institutions, by Country

Country	Leg.				Euro.		Eigenvalue	% VE	KMO
	Polit.	Parl.	Sys.	Police	Parl.	UN			
Austria	.80	.81	.77	.63	.81	.76	3.53	59	.80
Belgium	.85	.82	.76	.69	.85	.76	3.76	63	.87
Czech Republic	.80	.81	.77	.70	.76	.71	3.45	58	.78
Denmark	.84	.80	.75	.60	.76	.66	3.26	54	.79
East Germany	.81	.79	.69	.67	.76	.73	3.31	55	.80
Finland	.85	.83	.77	.63	.80	.73	3.58	60	.84
France	.83	.80	.77	.66	.81	.72	3.54	59	.87
Greece	.78	.83	.78	.71	.78	.74	3.57	60	.84
Hungary	.81	.80	.84	.76	.82	.77	3.85	64	.84
Ireland	.81	.80	.76	.55	.79	.67	3.24	54	.79
Israel	.81	.80	.68	.81	.76	.75	3.30	55	.78
Italy	.71	.81	.70	.67	.84	.78	3.40	57	.85
Luxembourg	.83	.83	.77	.67	.74	.63	3.38	56	.82
The Netherlands	.85	.77	.79	.69	.77	.73	3.54	59	.84
Norway	.77	.77	.77	.68	.65	.64	3.06	51	.77
Poland	.78	.75	.75	.67	.77	.71	3.26	54	.79
Portugal	.77	.78	.76	.63	.80	.76	3.40	57	.80
Slovenia	.78	.80	.80	.69	.82	.79	3.65	61	.83
Spain	.80	.85	.78	.74	.85	.80	3.90	65	.87
Sweden	.83	.82	.79	.68	.76	.65	3.42	57	.83
Switzerland	.81	.81	.77	.60	.75	.71	3.32	55	.80
UK	.85	.80	.76	.63	.76	.72	3.44	57	.82
United States	.86	.87	.89	.76	.76	.71	3.36	67	.85
West Germany	.79	.79	.75	.59	.79	.68	3.25	54	.80

NOTE.—Polit. = politicians; Parl. = parliament; Leg. Sys. = legal system; Euro. Parl. = European Parliament; UN = United Nations; % VE = % variance explained.

KMO, the Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin measure, indicates the extent to which the variables included in the model fit the underlying criteria. Values range from 1.0 (excellent) to 0.5 and less (poor).

Austria and Israel are fixed on a one-factor solution.

The “confidence in the European Parliament” question is missing in the US CID survey.

We use satisfaction with democracy as another measure of political support. Most previous work has found it useful to distinguish between support for the different institutions of democratic government and satisfaction with the way that democracy works generally. The ESS and US CID surveys use the same question as World Values, ISSP, Eurobarometer, and a great many national election studies, asking:

And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way that democracy works in [country]?

As before the ESS uses an 11-point rating scale, whereas most previous work uses a 4-point rating scale.

A final methodological point concerns two possible measures of social trust and confidence in institutions based on the results so far. We can use either the weighting of the principle component analysis of the three-item trust scale (which we name a factor score), or we can sum each individual's responses on the 11-point rating scales and divide the total by the number of valid responses, to give a minimum score of 0 and a maximum of 10 (which we name an index). We chose the indices in the analysis that follows. The two measures produce virtually identical results (see table 3), but we use the indices because we lose rather fewer cases from missing data this way.⁴

Generalized Social Trust, Confidence in Political Institutions, and Satisfaction with Democracy

Table 3 shows partial correlations between generalized social trust and political confidence. In this table we control for a set of eight variables that are often found to be associated with either social trust or political confidence, or both, namely, education, age, ethnicity, media consumption, social integration, religious beliefs, urban-rural environments, happiness, and life satisfaction (see Listhaug and Wiberg 1995; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Anderson 1998; Patterson 1999; Newton and Norris 2000; Putnam 2000; Anderson and Tverdova 2001; Delhey and Newton 2003; Freitag 2003; Mishler and Rose 2005). We would also have controlled for income and occupation but, unfortunately, data for these variables are missing to a greater or lesser extent for some countries, thereby reducing the number of cases available for analysis.

The results of the partial correlation analysis are neither weak nor patchy, but substantively strong in most countries and statistically significant at .001 in all of them (table 3). It makes virtually no difference whether factor scores or indices are used as measures of social trust and confidence, so the results are not an artifact of these particular forms of measurement. It is notable that the association between social trust and political confidence is also strong and significant in the United States (.38) so that in whatever respects America may be exceptional (Norris and Davis 2007), in this regard it is typical rather than exceptional.

If the figures in table 3 are to be believed there is a significant statistical association between social and political trust at the individual level in a wide variety of countries. Given the possible importance of these results for social capital theory and theories of the social bases of politics, the figures are worth testing in greater depth.

4. In the small number of cases where individuals did not answer all the questions, the sum of their scores is divided by the appropriate number of valid answers.

Table 3. Pearson's Partial Correlations between Social Trust and Political Confidence, Factors, and Indices

Country	Factor scores	Unweighted base	Indices	Unweighted base
United States	.38	897	.37	918
The Netherlands	.35	2,026	.35	2,244
Finland	.33	1,736	.31	1,824
Switzerland	.31	1,659	.28	1,911
Belgium	.30	1,439	.30	1,621
Sweden	.30	1,576	.29	1,828
East Germany	.30	898	.27	1,019
Luxembourg	.30	936	.24	1,199
Norway	.29	1,703	.31	1,982
Hungary	.28	1,048	.23	1,411
UK	.28	1,736	.28	1,916
Czech Republic	.27	889	.24	1,233
France	.27	1,323	.26	1,407
West Germany	.26	1,459	.25	1,618
Italy	.25	1,111	.26	1,065
Slovenia	.24	1,181	.24	1,365
Denmark	.24	1,205	.25	1,413
Austria	.23	1,841	.24	2,002
Spain	.23	1,231	.24	1,417
Ireland	.20	1,473	.18	1,745
Israel	.19	1,489	.19	2,109
Portugal	.18	1,032	.18	1,283
Poland	.16	1,358	.17	1,819
Greece	.13	1,963	.17	2,263

NOTE.—Factor scores are the first component of the social trust and political confidence scales. Indices are the sum of respondent's answers divided by the number of valid responses.

Coefficients are controlled for years of education, belonging to ethnic minorities, gender, age, happiness/satisfaction with life, hours of media consumption, satisfaction with democracy, meet socially with friends, being religious, and urban–rural measure. The US coefficients are controlled for highest grade, belonging to a group which is discriminated against, gender, age, satisfaction with life, hours of media consumption, satisfaction with democracy, meet socially with close friends, being religious, and urban–rural measure.

All correlations are significant at the .001 level, two-tailed test.

Apart from any differences in sampling methods and rigor, and fieldwork quality, the ESS measures of trust used in this study differ from previous surveys in two main ways:

1. *Number of indicators.* We use a battery of three, scaleable questions (the Rosenberg trust scale) for social trust, and a battery of six, scaleable questions to measure confidence in institutions. Most previous surveys use single questions for each of them, although it is notable that cross-national or time

series studies that find significant associations between social and political trust use batteries of questions to measure them (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Jagodzinski and Manabe 2004; Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal 2007; Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007).⁵

2. *Rating scales.* The ESS and US CID surveys ask respondents to place themselves on 11-point scales. There is evidence that rating scales of 7–11 points are more reliable measures of attitudes and values than the dichotomized (“yes/no”) or 4-point scales often used in other surveys (Alwin and Krosnick 1991; Scherpenzeel and Saris 1995; Cummins and Gullone 2000; Saris and Gallhofer 2003; Kroh 2005; Scherpenzeel 2002. See also O’Brien 1979). Three of the four cross-sectional studies that find significant correlations between social and political trust use 11-point rating scales (Jagodzinski and Manabe 2004; Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal 2007; Zmerli, Newton, and Montero 2007).

To test the hypothesis that our results are reliable because they are based on 11-point rating scales and more valid and reliable batteries of scaleable questionnaire items, we reestimated the correlations by approximating as closely as we could the measures (single questions) and rating scales (dichotomized or four-point) used in other work. We did this in a series of steps, changing one aspect of the measure or rating scale at a time in a quasi-experimental manner.

- First we use as a benchmark the original findings shown in the third column of table 3. These are derived from the social trust and political confidence indices using the 11-point rating scale of the ESS.
- Second, we use the single-item trust question with an 11-point rating scale, and the confidence in institutions measure based on six questions, also with 11-point rating scales.
- Third, we use the single social trust question with an 11-point rating scale and the single confidence in parliament measure, also with an 11-point rating scale.
- And last, we use the single social trust question with a dichotomized (yes/no) response option, and a single confidence in parliament question with a four-point rating scale, as used in the World Values studies.⁶

If it is correct that a number of indicators and a broad rating scale explain the differences between our own and other results, we would expect the partial correlations to decline as we simplify the measures to approximate those of previous research.⁷ Table 4 shows that this is what happens for every change of

5. On the dangers of single-question indicators of social trust, see van Deth 2003.

6. The conversion of ESS/US CID to World Values (Third Wave) rating scales was based on an attempt to replicate the rating scales and distributions of the latter as closely as possible.

7. It is also possible that respondents who see themselves as “middle of the road” types, or as “radicals” on the fringe of society and politics, may consistently mark the same points on an 11-point rating scale, thereby inflating the correlations between different questionnaire items.

Table 4. Associations between Social Trust and Political Confidence Using Different Indicators (Pearson's Partial Correlations)

Country	Full social trust and political confidence indices, 11-point rating scales		Single social trust question and political confidence index, 11-point rating scales		Single social trust and confidence in parliament question, 11-point rating scales		Single social trust (dichotomized) and confidence in parliament (4-point scale) questions	
	Coefficient	<i>n</i>	Coefficient	<i>n</i>	Coefficient	<i>n</i>	Coefficient	<i>n</i>
United States	.38	897	.35	917	.29	917	.25	917
The Netherlands	.35	2,244	.30	2,244	.23	2,237	.18	2,237
Finland	.31	1,824	.27	1,824	.21	1,815	.14	1,815
Switzerland	.28	1,911	.23	1,911	.17	1,863	.13	1,863
Belgium	.30	1,621	.23	1,621	.19	1,580	.14	1,580
Sweden	.29	1,828	.24	1,828	.19	1,822	.13	1,822
East Germany	.27	1,019	.19	1,019	.11	1,006	.07	1,006
Luxembourg	.24	1,199	.23	1,199	.21	1,098	.16	1,098
Norway	.31	1,982	.24	1,982	.17	1,982	.13	1,982
Hungary	.23	1,411	.22	1,411	.17	1,411	.15	1,411
UK	.28	1,916	.25	1,916	.20	1,912	.11	1,912
Czech Republic	.24	1,233	.20	1,233	.19	1,231	.13	1,231
France	.26	1,407	.22	1,407	.16	1,402	.07	1,402
West Germany	.25	1,618	.20	1,618	.17	1,605	.13	1,605
Italy	.26	1,065	.20	1,068	.14	1,068	.07	1,068

Continued

Table 4. Continued

Slovenia	.24	1,365	.20	1,365	.15	1,336	.11	1,336
Denmark	.25	1,413	.21	1,413	.15	1,413	.13	1,413
Austria	.24	2,002	.20	2,002	.15	2,002	.11	2,002
Spain	.24	1,417	.18	1,417	.16	1,398	.09	1,398
Ireland	.18	1,745	.15	1,745	.12	1,745	.09	1,745
Israel	.19	2,109	.17	2,109	.13	2,109	.09	2,109
Portugal	.18	1,283	.13	1,283	.10	1,264	.01	1,264
Poland	.17	1,819	.10	1,819	.10	1,810	.04	1,810
Greece	.17	2,263	.13	2,263	.12	2,239	.06	2,239

NOTE.—In the last column, social trust and confidence in parliament are recoded. In the case of social trust, scores of 7–10 are recoded as “trusting” and given a score of 1, and scores of 0–6 recoded as “can’t be too careful,” with a score of 0. Confidence in parliament scores of 9–10 are recoded as “great deal of confidence” and given a score of 4, 6–8 as “quite a lot” with a score of 3, 3–5 as “not very much” with a score of 2, and 0–2 as “no confidence” with a score of 1. This rescaling is close to that of the World Values but in reverse.

n = unweighted base.

Coefficients are controlled for years of education, belonging to ethnic minorities, gender, age, happiness/satisfaction with life, hours of media consumption, satisfaction with democracy, meet socially with friends, being religious, and urban–rural measure. The US coefficients are controlled for highest grade, belonging to a group which is discriminated against, gender, age, satisfaction with life, hours of media consumption, satisfaction with democracy, meet socially with close friends, being religious, and urban–rural measure.

All coefficients are significant at the .001 level, two-tailed test, with the exception of East Germany in the third coefficient column which is significant at the .01 level; France, Spain, and Greece in the last coefficient column, which are significant at the .01 level; Italy and East Germany in the last coefficient column which are significant at the .05 level; and Portugal and Poland in the last coefficient column which are not significant at all.

measures between columns and in every one of the 24 countries, with the single exception of Poland where the second and third partials are both .10. And while all partial correlations are significant at .001 in the first column, significance declines to .01 or .05 in some cases, and disappears altogether in the case of Portugal and Poland in the last column. It seems that the better the measures and the broader the rating scales of survey items for social trust and political confidence, the more likely they are to uncover statistical associations between variables. In addition, it is noteworthy that significant correlations between political confidence and generalized social trust signify not only a relationship on the domestic level but also for international institutions.

The importance of an 11-point rating scale is strongly confirmed by the British pilot study of the second wave of the ESS survey. This asked the same questions about social trust and political trust twice, once with a 4-point rating scale and once with an 11-point scale. In both cases, the three questions of the Rosenberg scale were used to measure social trust, and three questions about parliament, the legal system, and the police were asked to tap confidence in political institutions. Only one of the correlations between social trust and political confidence was statistically significant in the case of the 4-point scale, but all nine were significant for the 11-point scale (Saris and Satorra 2006).

We now turn to the association between generalized social trust and our other measures of political support—confidence in political institutions, and satisfaction with democracy.

Table 5 shows that there are also significant correlations between satisfaction with democracy and political confidence, and that the same is true of satisfaction with democracy and social trust. The significant correlations between social trust and satisfaction with democracy add further weight to social capital theory. However, it is notable that social trust has a much stronger link with confidence in political institutions than with satisfaction with democracy, although the latter correlations are also statistically significant in all 24 countries.⁸ The important point about table 5, however, is that it completes the three-cornered set of significant associations between social trust, political confidence, and satisfaction with democracy.

Summary and Conclusions

Although a central plank of social capital theory is that socially trusting individuals tend to be politically trusting, a good deal of empirical research at the individual level fails to support this claim. A positive correlation between the two has been found fairly consistently at the cross-national comparative level,

8. We cannot go into the reasons for the difference in this paper but it may have something to do with the fact that social trust is especially strongly related to confidence in the nonpolitical institutions of the police and the courts (and the civil service, not measured here), which have a direct effect on the social conditions promoting trust and trustworthy behavior.

Table 5. Associations between Social Trust and Satisfaction with Democracy, and Satisfaction with Democracy and Political Confidence (Pearson's Partial Correlations)

Country	Satisfaction with democracy and political confidence		Satisfaction with democracy and social trust	
	Coefficient	Unweighted base	Coefficient	Unweighted base
Finland	.58	1,824	.27	1,824
Sweden	.57	1,828	.26	1,828
Belgium	.52	1,621	.25	1,621
East Germany	.51	1,019	.18	1,019
United Kingdom	.51	1,916	.23	1,916
Czech Republic	.50	1,233	.24	1,233
Norway	.50	1,982	.22	1,982
Switzerland	.49	1,911	.19	1,911
West Germany	.49	1,618	.18	1,618
Denmark	.49	1,413	.17	1,413
Slovenia	.49	1,365	.25	1,365
Hungary	.48	1,411	.21	1,411
Ireland	.48	1,745	.15	1,745
The Netherlands	.48	2,244	.24	2,244
United States	.48	902	.30	902
France	.46	1,407	.15	1,407
Luxembourg	.45	1,199	.19	1,199
Poland	.44	1,819	.17	1,819
Austria	.43	2,002	.09	2,002
Italy	.43	1,068	.14	1,068
Spain	.42	1,417	.12	1,417
Greece	.42	2,263	.12	2,263
Israel	.37	2,109	.14	2,109
Portugal	.35	1,283	.20	1,283

NOTE.—Coefficients are controlled for years of education, belonging to ethnic minorities, gender, age, happiness/satisfaction with life, hours of media consumption, meet socially with friends, being religious, and urban–rural measure. The US coefficients are controlled for highest grade, belonging to a group which is discriminated against, gender, age, satisfaction with life, hours of media consumption, satisfaction with democracy, meet socially with close friends, being religious, and urban–rural measure.

All correlations are significant at the .001 level, two-tailed test.

where countries are treated as the units of analysis, but at the individual level the weight of the evidence suggests a weak or nonexistent relationship. However, it is notable that four studies have found statistically significant correlations between the two variables, and that they all use batteries of scaleable questions to measure social and political trust and that three of the four use 11-point rating scales. Most of the studies finding no significant correlations are based on

World Values or Eurobarometer surveys, which use single questions for social and for political trust, and either a dichotomized (yes/no) response option, or else a four-point scale.

This article partially replicates and extends similar work on the CID survey but it is based on a larger and broader range of countries included in the ESS and US CID surveys and on a larger and broader range of control variables. Nonetheless, this article also finds a strong and statistically significant three-cornered set of associations between generalized social trust, confidence in political institutions, and satisfaction with democracy at the individual level in all the 24 countries in the survey. With only a few exceptions, partial correlations are strong and significant at the .001 level after controlling for a set of eight independent variables that have commonly been found to be associated with social and political trust and satisfaction with democracy.

We argue that these results are valid and reliable, not a methodological or statistical aberration. The ESS and US CID surveys use a three-item scale to measure social trust (the Rosenberg scale), and a six-item scale to measure confidence in political institutions. They also use 11-point rating scales. On the face of it, these measures are more sensitive and accurate measures, and if so, the significant correlations we produce are more reliable than the insignificant, weak, or patchy ones of much of the previous research. The conclusion that it is the measures used, and not a lack of association between the variables, that account for the rather poor results of much of the previous research is supported by survey development work carried out by Saris and Satorra in the pilot study for the second wave of the ESS.

The figures suggest that generalized social trust, political confidence, and satisfaction with democracy are indeed tied together in a tight three-cornered syndrome. This, in turn, raises two sets of considerations, one methodological and the other theoretical.

Most surveys devote one question each to social trust and political confidence. The ESS survey uses a total of nine. The trade-off is between using batteries of scaleable items for only two variables, as against using single-questionnaire items for each variable, which leaves seven free for other matters. The problem is compounded, of course, if it is also necessary to use batteries of questions to measure other variables. Since most surveys are tightly constrained by costs this means they must choose between accurate and sensitive measures of fewer variables, or less accurate and less sensitive measures of more variables. This raises the old dilemma of quality versus quantity in a stark manner.

The theoretical implications of this study are wide ranging. If, indeed, there are significant associations at the individual level between social trust, political confidence, and satisfaction with democracy (even in the United States, which is often regarded as an exceptional case), then a range of further questions about social capital and civil society might be opened or reopened. Perhaps there is also a connection between these variables and activity in voluntary associations, as suggested by a long and distinguished line of theory from

de Tocqueville onward but not strongly confirmed by survey analysis. And if social trust, political confidence, and satisfaction with democracy are closely associated after all, this raises the matter of the origins of these attitudes and the extent to which they overlap and reinforce each other as social capital theory suggests they do. If the argument presented in this article is correct, then the ESS and the US CID are the best surveys for exploring these issues.

Appendix

RESPONSE RATES BY COUNTRY

Country	Response rate (%)
Austria	60.4
Belgium	59.2
Czech Republic	43.3
Denmark	67.6
Finland	73.2
France	na
Germany	57.1
Greece	80.0
Hungary	69.9
Ireland	64.5
Israel	71.0
Italy	43.7
Luxembourg	43.9
The Netherlands	67.9
Norway	65.0
Poland	73.2
Portugal	68.8
Slovenia	72.1
Spain	53.2
Sweden	69.5
Switzerland	33.5
United Kingdom	55.5
United States	40.0

Calculation of ESS response rate

$$= \frac{\text{Number of achieved interviews}}{\text{Number of individuals/households/addresses selected, minus ineligible}}$$

Calculation of US CID response rate

$$= \frac{I}{(I + P) + (R + NC + O) + e(UH + UO)}$$

This response rate is the number of complete interviews divided by the number of interviews (complete plus partial) plus the number of noninterviews (refusal and break-off plus noncontacts plus others) plus an estimate of what proportion of cases of unknown eligibility is actually eligible (unknown if housing unit, plus unknown, other).

Years of education is measured by the question, "How many years of full-time education have you completed?"

Age is measured by the question, "And in what year were you born?"

Belonging to ethnic minorities is measured by the question, "Do you belong to a minority ethnic group in [country]?" Response categories are "yes" and "no."

Hours of media consumption is measured by the question, "On an average weekday, how much time, in total, do you spend watching television? Please use this card to answer." Response categories are "no time at all," "less than ½ hour," "½ hour to 1 hour," "more than 1 hour, up to 1½ hours," "more than 1½ hours, up to 2 hours," "more than 2 hours, up to 2½ hours," "more than 2½ hours, up to 3 hours," and "more than 3 hours."

Meet socially with friends is measured by the question, "Using this card, how often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?" Response categories are "never," "less than once a month," "once a month," "several times a month," "once a week," "several times a week," and "every day."

Being religious is measured by the question, "Regardless of whether you belong to a particular religion, how religious would you say you are? Please use this card." Response categories are an 11-point scale from "not at all religious" to "very religious."

The urban-rural measure is measured by the question, "Which phrase on this card best describes the area where you live?" Response categories are "a big city," "the suburbs or outskirts of a big city," "a town or a small city," "a country village," and "a farm or home in the countryside."

The happiness/satisfaction with life index is based on the questions, "Taking all things together, how happy would you say you are? Please use this card." Response categories are an 11-point scale from "extremely unhappy" to "extremely happy." "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your life as a whole nowadays? Please answer using this card, where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied." The index is constructed by adding up the two question items and dividing the sum by the number of valid answers.

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