Political Trust Vs. Generalized Trust in Political Participation

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ABSTRACT: A key operationalization of the concept of social capital is the degree to which people believe they can, in general, trust people. Social capital theory maintains that generalized interpersonal trust should promote civic engagement, but research results to date indicate that trust influences engagement either weakly or not at all. Generalized trust may not show an influence on civic engagement because it may contain features that both promote and inhibit collective action. If people trust political and community leaders they may believe there is no need to participate. This paper seeks to find a strong, positive relationship between trust and collective action by developing a measure of specifically political social trust. This measure specifies that other community members are being trusted to abide by norms of political cooperation. The measure is tested using a representative mail survey of 1200 Pittsburgh residents. Ordered probit and regression analyses find political trust superior to generalized trust in predicting reported motivation to act on community problems, participation in organizations in which community problems are discussed, and participation in organizations that take action on community problems. Generalized trust proves superior to political social trust in predicting self-reported attendance at community planning meetings, but such meetings are primarily about communicating concerns to community leaders, not collective political action.

KEYWORDS: Social Capital, Social Trust, Political Capital, Political Participation


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One of the chief operationalizations of the concept of social capital in political science is the degree to which people believe they can trust others in general. Research on this instantiation of social capital indicates that it correlates with many beneficial social consequences (Knack and Kropf 1998; Putnam 1995; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993; Smith 1999). One of Putnam's key claims is that civic engagement and generalized interpersonal trust, a type of social capital are in a strong reciprocal relationship. Putnam's evidence for this claim is aggregated and correlational, which has prompted a number of efforts to examine the relationship with more appropriate individual data and with statistical techniques, such as structural equation modeling, and time-series data which can help sort out reciprocal effects and causation. These studies either find a weak or non-existent relationship from generalized trust to engagement (Brehm and Rahn 1997; Claibourn and Martin 2000; Shah 1998), with the statistically most sound study showing no effect.

Generalized trust does not show a consistent influence on civic engagement perhaps because it contains features that both promote and inhibit collective action, resulting in no discernible net effect. A trusting person should be more likely to believe collective action is possible and could be effective, making them more likely to participate. On the other hand, if people trust political and community leaders, they may see no need to participate. As Claibourn (2000) points out, people who trust everyone may have little incentive to organize collective action.

This paper seeks to find a strong, positive relationship between trust and collective action by developing a measure of specifically political social trust. This measure specifies that other community members are being trusted to abide by norms of political cooperation. The measure is tested using a representative mail survey of 1200 residents of the Highland Park neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Ordered probit and regression analyses find political trust superior to generalized trust in predicting reported motivation to act on community problems, participation in organizations in which community problems are discussed, and participation in organizations that take action on community problems. Generalized trust proves superior to political social trust in predicting self-reported attendance at community planning meetings, but such meetings are primarily about communicating concerns to community leaders, not collective political action.

SOCIAL CAPITAL

Adler and Kwon, in their synthesis of the literature on social capital, defines social capital as, "Social capital is the goodwill available to individuals or groups. Its source lies in the structure and content of the actor’s social relations. Its effects flow from the information, influence, and solidarity it makes available to the actor." (Adler and Kwon 2002, p. 7) Adler notes that it is not any kind of social relations that count toward
social capital, but ones of social exchange. Social exchange: a) is distinct from market exchange and exchanges involving authority, b) involves favors and gifts, c) does not involve specific or explicit terms of exchange (the gift-giver does not contract to receive a specific gift at some future date), and d) is symmetric (actors expect to not come out better or worse off than others in the long run). Adler believes a key feature of social capital is its "appropriability"—namely, the relative ease with which the goodwill from relations of social exchange can be used for other purposes, such as political or economic purposes.

Relations of social exchange give rise to social capital through three general avenues—opportunity, motivation, and ability (Adler and Kwon 2002). For example, social exchanges result in more durable social relations that constitute social networks. Such networks provide actors with opportunities to draw on the resources of others when these resources are needed. Social exchange can also motivate actors to aid one another by instilling or creating opportunities for the development of trust, social norms, generalized reciprocity, and solidarity (Portes 1998; Putnam, Leonardi, and Nanetti 1993). Finally, the abilities of actors in the social network, including skills and ownership of property, give rise to the resources that are the outcome of social capital.

Adler's general conceptualization of social capital is more broad than the notion of social capital used by political scientists, though consideration of Adler's concept helps situate the political science notion. Social capital as defined by Adler could include, for example, social relations that help people find jobs or be more successful managers. In contrast, Brehm and Rahn define social capital as, "...the web of cooperative relationships between citizens that facilitate resolution of collective action problems." (Brehm and Rahn 1997) Political scientists focus on those aspects of social capital that facilitate citizen cooperation, particularly anything that addresses the collective action dilemma. In brief, political scientists are interested in those aspects of Adler's more inclusive notion of social capital that are politically relevant.

Putnam helps identify the features of social relations that contribute to this politically-specific form of social capital by defining social capital as: "...features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit." (Putnam 1995) (p.67) Dissected into Adler's framework, networks structure opportunities and, in another sense, constitute the social exchanges that serve as the medium of social capital. Norms constitute a motivational mechanism, and Adler considers trust a contributor to motivation. Trust is a source of social capital, though not social capital itself.

**GENERALIZED SOCIAL TRUST**

Generalized social trust proves to be an important part of political research on social capital (Cook 2001; Rahn and Transue 1998; Shah 1998; Stolle 1998). Generalized social trust is an expectation that other people in a society will generally abide by commonly held social norms, roles, and ethical dictates. People who have generalized social trust expect their society to function as it "should." This definition implies a potential limitation of the explanatory power of the concept. While people may possess some general notion of the trustworthiness of others, it is at least possible that their behavior in many concrete cases is guided by more particular forms of trust. Particularized trust would specify what standards are expected to be followed, by whom,
under what conditions. Generalized social trust may be just a summary of these more contextualized notions of trust.

**RESEARCH ON GENERALIZED SOCIAL TRUST AND CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

Three recent studies have sought to disentangle the relationship between social trust and civic engagement at the individual level, finding weak or non-existent effects. Brehm and Rahn (1997) apply latent variable analysis to General Social Surveys data from 1972 to 1994. The data do not constitute a time series of the same people over time, but merely unrelated cross-sections at various points in time, which the authors have pooled into a single dataset for analysis. Because time-series were not involved, the data cannot provide definitive answers regarding direction of causality. The authors used, in effect, instrumental variables to pull apart the reciprocal relationships between trust and engagement, measured as participation in a wide variety of community groups. They find significant effects of trust on engagement and vice versa. The unstandardized coefficient for the effect of trust on engagement, however, proves to be small. Trust does prove to have a substantial effect on confidence in governmental institutions, suggesting it is not without important political effects.

Shah (1998) applies two stage least squares to the 1995 DDB Needham Life Style Study. He finds no significant relationship from trust to engagement, but a strong relationship from engagement to trust. The results can be questioned because Shah's instrumental variables explain such a small portion of variation in trust and engagement.

Claibourn and Martin (2000) offer arguably the strongest results to date. The study involves a time-series analysis of data from the Michigan Socialization Studies, analyzing the students and parent groups separately. They apply two-stage least squares and two-stage ordered probit to three Socialization Studies surveys from the period 1965 to 1982. The authors use responses to questions about engagement (group memberships) and trust in earlier periods of time as instrumental variables to sort out reciprocal relationships in the 1982 survey. In addition, the analyses show the cross-lagged effects of trust in 1973 on engagement in 1982. Cross-lagged effects help clarify the direction of causation. They find no significant effects, whether reciprocal or cross-lagged, of trust on engagement. A potential weakness of the study is the nine year lag between one survey and the next, which may be too great a gap to discern cross-lagged effects.

**IS GENERALIZED TRUST TOO GENERAL?**

Sullivan and Transue (1999) raise a paradox with respect to generalized trust. They observe that psychological research has repeatedly found that people compartmentalize their attitudes. Sullivan and Transue believe that it is not cognitively demanding for people to apply different perceptions of trustworthiness to different groups of people. So, they ask, how is it that Putnam's data shows aggregate relationships between generalized trust and political consequences?

It seems, however, that this paradox does not arise with respect to civic engagement, because the proper individual-level analyses find little or no evidence for an effect of generalized trust on engagement. Generalized trust does appear to have some political effects in this research, notably Brehm and Rahn's (1997) finding that trust affects confidence in government. This could be not because generalized trust best captures the type of trust that matters for politics, but because generalized trust captures some average of more particular types of trust, including politically-relevant trust. Alternatively, generalized trust may be interpreted by some survey respondents as
political trust. In surveys that focus heavily on political and social issues, some respondents may interpret generalized trust questions as being about political trust, according to the logic of conversation that seems to guide survey responses (Schwarz 1993). If so, the meaning of the generalized trust questions may vary due to subtle cues in the questionnaire, making the political implications of trust dependent on the specific survey in which it is found. This could explain the inconsistent findings of the effects of trust on engagement.

Brehm and Rahn's (1997) positive findings regarding the engagement effects of trust may be due to a survey context that caused respondents to interpret the trust questions as being about political trust. It is intriguing that they find an extremely powerful effect of confidence in government institutions on generalized trust. I find it implausible that government institutions could in any way help guarantee that people in everyday interactions will be trustworthy. If, however, respondents in this study understood trust as political trust, then confidence in institutions should be relevant.

**POLITICAL TRUST**

In this paper, I seek to test measures of trust that are specifically political. These are expectations that other members of the community will abide by norms that make it possible to act collectively to achieve political ends. These include perceptions that people in the community are willing to work together on common problems, that they are willing to talk reasonably with each other, and that they care about community problems. The survey utilized did not take pains to insulate the generalized trust measure from a political interpretation. Instead, this research assumes that at least some respondents will interpret the generalized trust measure as non-political, allowing the political trust measures to better explain civic engagement than the general measure.

Because the focus is on politically-specific trust, this paper will examine the effects of trust on participation in organizations in which community issues are discussed or acted upon, not engagement in a broad variety of organizations, such as sports and hobby groups, that are typically counted toward "civic engagement." I hypothesize that political trust will better explain such participation than generalized trust. Also, because the goal here is to show that political trust performs better than generalized trust, I will not seek to disentangle reciprocal effects between trust and civic engagement (at least not in this preliminary version of the paper). I simply wish to show that political trust has a stronger relationship with engagement, accounting for a variety of additional influences.

The notion of a more politically-specific form of social capital does occur in the literature, though it does not appear to have thus far been conceptualized as a more politically-relevant notion of trust. Lake and Huckfeldt (1998) discuss the impact of "politically-relevant social capital" on political participation. They have in mind the political expertise in people's social networks and frequency of political discussion in these networks. Booth and Richard (1998) discuss "political capital," into which they have incorporated subscription to democratic norms and political participation.

**METHOD**

**Participants**

One thousand two hundred Pittsburgh residents of voting age were selected from Cole Information Services' "Marketshare" directory of the Highland Park neighborhood of Pittsburgh and a few neighboring census block areas. Of all available directories, this directory comes closest to being an exhaustive list of adults in the Pittsburgh area. Data
for the directory, which is updated biannually, comes from the Census, phone book, voting lists, obituaries, and other sources. Because of its information sources, the directory likely overrepresents adults who have permanent residency and therefore underrepresents the economically disadvantaged. Nevertheless, the Marketshare directory is superior to alternative directories. A simple random sample was drawn.

Data was obtained from 280 respondents, with a response rate of 31%. Non-respondents and those who explicitly declined participation are counted toward the denominator of the response rate. Those not counted are the deceased, ineligible, and bad addresses. Death was determined by communications with people familiar with the respondent or from the Social Security Death Index. The ineligible include people who are younger than 18 years of age, not American citizens, or no longer residents of Highland Park. Respondents were counted as bad addresses if so indicated by the Postal Service and no forwarding address in the sample region was available.

As described below, the social research described here was included on a survey for the Highland Park Community Plan, an organization dedicated to determining how to improve neighborhood conditions. The preponderance of questions were about neighborhood concerns. Thus, non-respondents likely opted-out of the survey for reasons unrelated to the social science questions on the survey, insulating results at least in one respect from self-selection biases.

Survey respondents were 57% female; had a median age of 40; and were 77% Caucasian, 13% African-American, and 10% other. The mean education was part way between a college degree and "some graduate school." The area does have many people who work at local universities. Seventy-seven percent of respondents owned their own home. Due to their high level of education, the respondents are not a typical population. But, they do represent a population that should be more civically engaged—offering greater variability on an outcome of interest to this paper. Thirty-three percent of respondents belonged to an organization that had sought to take action on neighborhood problems. Highland Park is located in Pittsburgh, a city of 334,583 and over one million including surrounding areas, according to the 2000 Census. Highland Park includes residential areas as well as pockets of urban poverty.

**Materials and Procedures**

Respondents were mailed a copy of the survey, which was accurately presented as a confidential survey of the Highland Park Community Plan Corporation in cooperation with Community Connections, a non-profit and non-partisan community engagement research organization housed at Carnegie Mellon University. Due to a lack of resources, there was no incentive provided with the survey other than the possibility of having concerns heard by the community planning officials. An effort was made to go door-to-door to encourage people to complete their surveys. If respondents were not present, a flyer was left encouraging survey completion. Respondents were given the option of completing the survey by taking it online with a unique password available only to them. About one-sixth of the sample chose to respond online.

**Measures**

**Dependent Variables**

Problem Motivation: "How motivated are you to do something about Highland Park's problems?" The question was followed by an 11 point scale containing the labels: Not motivated / Moderately motivated / Very motivated. All survey scales were 11-point scales.
Joined Groups That Talk Politics: This variable is a count of the number of Highland Park groups in which a person participated in which community issues were discussed. First, respondents were asked to identify groups in which they had participated and then determine, of the groups they had selected, how many discussed politics. The identify groups question was: "Below, put a check next to any groups in which you have taken part in any sort of activity in the past 6 months. (Please select only those groups that meet in or very near Highland Park)" The selection of groups, derived from standard surveys, included: Church, temple, or other place of worship; Adult sports or outdoor organization; Youth organization like youth sports leagues; Veteran's group; Parent's organization (like the PTA or PTO) or other school group; Neighborhood association (crime watch, block, homeowner or tenant); Clubs or organizations for older people; Charity or social welfare organization; Labor union; Professional, trade, or business association; Service clubs or fraternal organizations (Lions, women's club, etc.); Ethnic, nationality or civil rights organizations; Public interest groups, political clubs, or party committees; Hobby, investment or garden club or societies; Any other kinds of clubs or organizations. The question tapping discussion of community issues in these groups was: "In how many of the groups you just selected do people or leaders ever discuss community issues such as crime or housing? (Enter 0 if none.)"

Joined Political Action Groups: This variable refers to the group identification question above and is phrased: "Of the groups you selected, how many took any local action for social or political reform in the past 12 months?"

For both of the "joined" dependent variables above, a small number of observations in the upper extreme of the resulting dependent variable were collapsed to the next lowest level to make the variable more appropriate for ordered probit analysis.

Attended Plan Meeting: "Have you attended any of the Highland Park Community Plan meetings in the last six months?" (Yes / No)

Key Independent Variables

Generalized Trust: "People in my community can be trusted." (11-pt scale labeled "Not true" / "Very True").

Political trust is measured by the following variables. Due to results in the factor analysis section of the paper, only the first of these variables is used for the regression analyses. All scales are the same as for the generalized trust measure.

Political Trust (Work Together): "People in my community are willing to work together on common problems."

Political Trust (Talk Reasonably): "People in my community are willing to talk reasonably with each other."

Political Trust (People Care): "People in my community care about community problems."

Sundry Control Variables

Trust Officials: "Officials can be trusted to solve community problems on their own."

Busy: An average of responses to two questions—"I am a really busy person." and the negative of "I have a lot of free time."

Resident: "Are you a resident of Highland Park?" Some respondents were residents of nearby census blocks.

Work Locally: "Do you work in Highland Park?"
Happy with Neighborhood: "I am... (Very unhappy / Neither / Very happy) ...with the condition of Highland Park."

Neighborhood Improving: "The condition of Highland Park is now... (Much worse / Neither / Much better) ...than it was five years ago.

Problems Important: "How important are Highland Park's problems to you? (Not important / Moderately important / Very important)

Demographics—Standard demographic questions from the ANES and other sources.

RESULTS

Two types of evidence could help establish a measure of political trust. It would be helpful to find that political trust questions load on a distinctly different factor than does generalized trust. As explained earlier, however, it may be that many respondents interpret generalized trust questions as being about political trust in surveys that stress political issues. If so, it may be difficult to show that generalized trust is fully distinct from political trust. Another line of evidence would involve showing that political trust does appreciably better at explaining politically-relevant civic engagement than does generalized trust. To anticipate, the factor analyses find no evidence that generalized and political trust are distinct. Regression analysis, however, shows that political trust is superior to generalized trust in explaining politically-relevant civic engagement.

Factor Analysis

Table 1 depicts two exploratory maximum likelihood factor analyses. Analysis I shows only one factor because the analysis routine only permitted one factor (all but the first eigenvectors in a parallel principal components analysis prove negative and therefore unacceptable). With high loadings and low uniqueness (high communality), the analysis indicates generalized trust and the three political trust variables have correlations that fit very well with the supposition of a single underlying factor. Analysis II adds a variable, trusting officials to solve community problems, and shows a rather different pattern. Here, a second factor is possible and all of the political trust variables load strongly on this factor, notably the "Work Togethe" variable. Generalized trust does not load on this second factor at all. The second factor seems to involve trusting that people can address community problems. Note that trusting officials does remain largely unique.
Table 1—Exploratory Maximum Likelihood Factor Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Uniqueness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generalized Trust</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Care</td>
<td>0.80</td>
<td>0.37</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk Reasonably</td>
<td>0.88</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Together</td>
<td>0.85</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis II

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Factor 1</th>
<th>Factor 2</th>
<th>Uniqueness</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generalized Trust</td>
<td>0.98</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People Care</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.59</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talk Reasonably</td>
<td>0.41</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Together</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.94</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust Officials</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.87</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis II serves as a reminder that exploratory factor analysis depends heavily on what variables are included. Perhaps the most important variable that could not be included in the analyses of Table 1 was a second variable measuring generalized trust, because a second question was not included on the survey due to space concerns. Had such a second measure of generalized trust been included, it is at least conceivable that the factor analysis would show that generalized trust is a distinct factor from political trust. Such speculation aside, what Table 1 indicates is ambiguous. Analysis I suggests that only one factor explains the generalized and political trust responses, but analysis II offers a hint that a second factor may be involved.

I will proceed to regression analyses by selecting just one of the political trust questions to compete with the generalized trust question. If a scale containing all of the political trust questions were used instead, any superior showing for the political trust questions might simply be due to reduction in error variance from averaging the variables. I chose to use the "Work Together" variable to represent political trust in the regression analyses. Analysis I shows that it has the same loading on the single common factor as the generalized trust question, and the same uniqueness as well. Thus, any superior showing for the "Work Together" question could not be due to greater fit with the underlying factor. Analysis II indicates that this question does not load on the same factor as generalized trust. Also, the "Work Together" question has the least correlation with the generalized trust question, and it best exemplifies the notion of political trust—as trust that others will be willing to work on common problems.

Regression Analyses

Table 2 shows the effect of political and generalized trust on a variety of civic engagement behaviors and a related attitude. "Problem Motivation" is stated motivation
to address community problems. The next two columns regard dependent that constitute counts of the numbers of groups in which respondents said they participated in which community issues were discussed and action was taken regarding community issues, respectively. The final column is for attending a community plan meeting. The first three output columns clearly show that political trust proves superior to generalized trust in correlating with the dependent variables.
### Table 2—Political Trust Vs. Generalized Trust in Explaining Political Civic Engagement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dependent Variables</th>
<th>Problem Motivation</th>
<th>Joined Groups That Talk Politics</th>
<th>Joined Political Action Groups</th>
<th>Attended Plan Meeting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent Variables:</td>
<td>Standardized Coefficient (Stdized Robust Standard Error)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Political Trust</td>
<td>.19(.07)**</td>
<td>.27(.11)**</td>
<td>.41(.12)**</td>
<td>-.16(.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generalized Trust</td>
<td>-.09(.07)</td>
<td>.03(.10)</td>
<td>.10(.11)</td>
<td>.31(.18)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trust Officials</td>
<td>.09(.05)*</td>
<td>-.05(.08)</td>
<td>-.07(.08)</td>
<td>.18(.11)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Busy</td>
<td>-.13(.05)**</td>
<td>-.03(.09)</td>
<td>.02(.09)</td>
<td>-.46(.14)***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resident</td>
<td>.04(.06)</td>
<td>-.20(.06)***</td>
<td>-.19(.06)***</td>
<td>.07(.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Locally</td>
<td>.08(.05)*</td>
<td>.15(.06)**</td>
<td>.17(.06)**</td>
<td>-.11(.12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Happy w/ Neighborhd</td>
<td>-.01(.07)</td>
<td>.07(.11)</td>
<td>.03(.09)</td>
<td>-.35(.16)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbor. Improving</td>
<td>.02(.07)</td>
<td>-.17(.11)*</td>
<td>-.24(.10)**</td>
<td>.37(.15)**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problems Important</td>
<td>.56(.06)***</td>
<td>.09(.08)</td>
<td>.06(.09)</td>
<td>.17(.13)†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>-.08(.05)†</td>
<td>-.05(.08)</td>
<td>-.07(.08)</td>
<td>-.19(.13)†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.04(.06)</td>
<td>.15(.11)†</td>
<td>.20(.11)*</td>
<td>-.13(.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Own Home</td>
<td>.07(.05)†</td>
<td>.01(.09)</td>
<td>-.09(.09)</td>
<td>.14(.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Afro-American</td>
<td>.11(.06)*</td>
<td>.14(.09)*</td>
<td>.03(.08)</td>
<td>-.05(.15)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>-.13(.05)**</td>
<td>.04(.09)</td>
<td>-.01(.10)</td>
<td>.20(.13)†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have Kids</td>
<td>.19(.06)***</td>
<td>.11(.08)t</td>
<td>.21(.08)**</td>
<td>.01(.12)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N ; Pseudo R² 257; .04 263; .06 263; .00 260; .00

**H₀**: Trust = Political Trust

| Trust | 0.0135 | 0.0937 | 0.0611 | 0.0560 |

**Notes:** OLS used for Problem Motivation; Ordered probit used for the rest. Standard errors adjusted to be valid for standardized coefficients. Ordered probit coefficients are "standardized" in the sense that the independent variables were standarized before analysis.  
† p<.10; * p<.05; ** p<.01; *** p<.001; All p-values one-sided. Hypotheses are directional.

Generalized trust, however, proves better at explaining attending a community plan meeting. Does this show that generalized trust does better explain some political
participation? A closer examination of community plan meetings suggests that these meetings are not occasions for collaborative political efforts. People attend not as organization members, but as individual citizens intent on relaying their concerns to community leaders. Community groups do not organize collective efforts in these meetings, though perhaps a few individual group members see themselves as representing their groups' views at the meetings. Indeed, 67% of those who said they attended a community plan meeting indicated they do not participate in any organizations involved in political action, and 62% indicated they do not participate in any organization that even discusses community issues. Going to these meetings should, for most people, imply that they trust community leaders sufficiently to simply state their views and assume these views will be taken into consideration. It makes sense that people require generalized trust to engage in such action. Rather than being evidence that political trust fails to better capture one type of political engagement, the weakness of this variable in explaining community plan meeting attendance makes a case for the discriminant validity of political trust. The finding of an effect of generalized trust on community plan meeting attendance also suggests that some forms of civic engagement might be promoted by generalized rather than political trust.

Most of the remaining significant coefficients in the table are self-explanatory. The one puzzle is that non-resident status increased the probability of participation in politically-oriented groups. This, no doubt, is an indication of self-selection. People in census blocks surrounding but not in Highland Park should have felt less motivated to respond to a Highland Park survey. Those who did respond apparently had higher levels of participation in Highland Park groups concerned with community problems.

### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The hypothesis of a strong reciprocal relationship between generalized trust and civic engagement is a key feature of the social capital theory presented by Putnam. Unfortunately, the influence of generalized trust on civic engagement has been repeatedly shown to be weak or non-existent. The strongest research to date finds no relationship of trust on engagement and at best weak evidence for the reverse relationship. Given the capacity of people to compartmentalize their attitudes, it is surprising that generalized trust would have much effect on political action (Sullivan and Transue 1999). The powerful effects of confidence in governmental institutions on generalized trust in one study (Brehm and Rahn 1997) suggests that people at least at times interpret questions about generalized trust as questions about a more politically relevant type of trust. It may be that contextual cues in some surveys lead respondents to interpret questions about generalized trust as actually being about political trust. If so, the relationship between civic engagement and generalized trust may prove to be dependent on the degree to which respondents to a given survey interpret the generalized trust questions in a political way. This might explain why a relationship is found in some studies and not others.

This paper proposed a measure of political trust that might prove to have a more stable and significant relationship with politically-oriented civic engagement. A factor analysis (Table 1) of political and generalized trust seeks to determine whether political trust is distinct from generalized trust. The analysis provides ambiguous evidence for the distinctiveness of political trust, which is not entirely surprising given that a) only one variable was available to measure generalized trust and b) no effort was made to insulate
the generalized trust question from a political interpretation. Nevertheless, it may be that enough respondents interpreted the generalized trust question apolitically that political trust would prove superior to generalized trust in "explaining" civic engagement. Indeed, this proves to be the case. A single political trust question was selected for further analysis. The selected question loads as well on the underlying common factor as does generalized trust—giving it no advantage in terms of reliability. Table 2 shows that political trust proves superior to generalized trust in explaining motivation to address community problems and in explaining two of three civic engagement activities.

The third activity, attending a community plan meeting, proves on closer examination to not involve a collective political effort but instead is an event in which people relay their concerns to community leaders. Thus, while generalized trust proves important for this form of civic engagement, political trust proves more important to civic engagement involving collective political action. Because political scientists define social capital as that which allows action in the face of the collective action problem, the analyses here suggest it is political, not generalized, trust that best fits the notion of social capital.

The analysis in this paper could be further developed. A confirmatory factor analysis might provide a slightly clearer understanding of the factor structure. Another possibility would be to build a two-stage least squares model to disentangle reciprocal effects between engagement and trust, to further establish the value of political capital in explaining engagement.
Bibliography


