

Bridge Clubs Versus The Michigan Militia: The Impact of Social Capital on Attitudes Toward Political Violence

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Violent political action is a serious concern for contemporary democracies. There is growing documentation that citizens in general are becoming distrustful of government and frustrated with conventional politics. They instead are turning to alternative, sometimes violent forms of participation. A growing body of literature suggests that high levels of social capital may foster successful democracy by promoting norms of interpersonal trust and generalized reciprocity. This paper examines the impact of trust and civic involvement on both citizens' attitudes towards political violence and their propensity to engage in system-challenging acts. Where social capital bridges traditional ethnic, religious and familial cleavages, people are less likely to support or engage in political violence. Where social capital bonds individuals to primordial loyalties, people are more likely to support using violence for political means.

Introduction

Contemporary democracies often face the frightening prospect of violent political division. This division may manifest itself in the form of violent strikes, demonstrations, or assassinations, and has the potential to create widespread turmoil within a society. Riots in urban America during the 1960s, the indigenous uprising in Chiapas Mexico in 1994, ongoing Palestinian-Israeli conflicts, poisonous gas attacks in Japanese subways, and violent world-wide protests during the past year regarding the policies of multilateral lending institutions are but a few examples of such violent, system-challenging acts.

These acts disrupt peaceful democratic functioning and may carry high costs for society by disturbing economic interactions, causing the loss of human life, and creating a demand for law enforcement or military expenditure. Politically motivated violence also breeds distrust, both in fellow citizens who are committing the violence and in government institutions, upon which the difficult duty of restoring order falls.

Traditional explanations have accounted for such acts in two main ways. The first, *relative deprivation*, views political violence as a deep-seated emotional outburst, resulting from citizens' expectations rising faster than economic realities. In *Why Men Rebel* Ted Gurr defines relative deprivation as a perceived discrepancy

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between "value expectations" and "value capabilities." Relative deprivation ultimately asserts that individuals who feel marginalized, who believe that they are under-privileged, ineffective, and excluded from mainstream society and institutions are more likely to engage in political violence.

The second, a rational *choice approach*, regards political violence as a strategic, cost-benefit calculation. This approach suggests that individuals (and the groups they comprise) participate in political demonstrations, strikes, and uprisings only if they expect to profit more than they stand to lose. Individuals who are already thoroughly marginalized and have nothing to lose, who feel that their culture faces extinction or that they face barriers to conventional participation, are more likely to embrace political violence (Olson, 1965; Tullock, 1971).

Russell Dalton, in *Citizen Politics*, introduces a third explanation for system-challenging acts. He writes, "there is mounting new evidence ... that citizen orientations toward democratic political institutions and democratic processes are changing substantially. By the early 1990s, public trust in government hit historic lows in the public opinion polls ... this suggests that the ideals of a democratic political culture are changing" (Dalton, 2000). Dalton, among others, proposes a resource mobilization model that "presume(s) that political dissatisfaction and social conflicts are inherent in every society; thus the formation of social movements depends not on the existence of these interests but on the creation of organizations to mobilize this potential" (Oberschall, 1973; McCarthy & Zald, 1973; McCarthy & Zald, 1987; Jenkins, 1983; Dalton, 1990).

Resource mobilization theorists do not regard challenging participation as a threat to democracy, but rather as a transition of democratic values. This is largely the case because resource mobilization studies focus on protest politics, strikes, and demonstrations and the citizens with the resources to engage in these forms of "protest politics." Citizens engaging in protest politics tend to be educated and affluent individuals who hold postmaterialist values (Inglehart, 1990).

The political motivations for violent acts, however, are inextricably linked to system-challenging acts and changing attitudes towards "politics as usual." Unconventional political participation includes a variety of acts, not all of which pose an imminent threat to society. The following figure represents a continuum of some forms of participation.

Figure 1. Continuum of Political Participation

Voting Contact rep. Signing petition Strike Demonstrations

Occupying a building Bombing/Assasin.

Participation encompasses a broad spectrum, moving from conventional participation on the left of this continuum (voting, contacting an elected represent

tative, signing a petition), to more unconventional forms of participation (strikes, demonstrations), to forcibly occupying a building and ultimately outright political violence such as terrorism, hostage taking, and assassinations.

Dalton considers individuals' propensity to occupy a building as the most extreme political act in the participation continuum. This paper seeks to explain why citizens might choose to engage in such extreme acts and moves one step further by examining citizens' attitudes toward the use of violence to achieve political ends. A growing body of literature focusing on the importance of social capital to the overall functioning of democracy is critical to this analysis.

The Literature

Social Capital- The Illness, The Cure, or an Unrelated Factor?

Analyses of the individual motivations for system- challenging acts and political violence inevitably include discussion of societal norms regarding interpersonal trust, group cohesion, and civic engagement. These topics are the central subject of a body of literature on social capital. Originally coined by Progressive Era rural education reformer L.J. Hanifan and later expanded upon by social theorists and economists, the term social capital refers to "connections among individuals" and "the social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them" (Putnam, 2000:19). Social capital is considered an input, like human and physical capital, which can aid in producing favorable societal outputs.

Social capital, so the argument goes, lubricates social, political, and economic interactions by lowering transaction costs and creating mutual disincentives for malfeasance and opportunism (Putnam, 2000). Political scientists make the case that societies characterized by high levels of social capital exhibit more trust and generalized reciprocity, which subsequently makes them more efficient (Putnam, 1993; Putnam, 2000; Fukuyama 1995; Woller, 1999). Social capital breeds the attitudes and practices of trusting democratic participation. It encourages citizens to be active in community affairs and pursue peaceful means for expressing their opinions and ideas.

It is noteworthy, however, that social capital can have negative consequences that increase societal fragmentation and thus incur costs for governments and citizens. As Robert Putnam points out in his book, *Bowling Alone*, social capital enabled Timothy McVeigh to carry out his scheme to bomb the Oklahoma City Federal Building. This "dark side" of social capital easily fosters distrust and anomie. Robert Putnam distinguishes between "bridging" social capital, which tends to create broad societal linkages and generalized reciprocity, and "bonding" social capital, which reinforces existing loyalties and within-group homogeneity. The former would tend to lubricate societal workings while the latter may have the effect of creating **strong in-group loyalty** and out-group enmity. The presence of strong bonding ties alone is not necessarily negative; no one would argue that ethnic pride

and a belief in the importance of family are automatically dangerous characteristics. Combined and in the presence of other factors, however, bonding social capital can breed powerful primordial feelings of in-group solidarity and distrust of others.

Table 1. Characteristics of Bridging and Bonding Social Capital

SOCIAL CAPITAL Bridging		Bonding
HIGH	High trust, high membership in professional, charitable, educational and recreational organizations.	Family, ethnicity, and other loyalties are very important. Strong local identification. Small community.
LOW	Lack of interpersonal trust, low group membership.	Family and ethnicity are not primary self identification. Low sense of local belonging.

These two contrasting notions of social capital bring into question its

impact on attitudes towards political violence and system-challenging acts. If social capital indeed fosters trust and reciprocity amongst citizens, it follows that they would be more likely to use inclusive conventional democratic channels (voting, writing an elected official) and engage in peaceful participation. If, however, social capital breeds such tight in-group loyalties that citizens only trust a small segment of the population that is like them, then social capital may contribute towards individual's propensity to view violence as an acceptable political action.

Is Political Violence Tied to Social Capital?

It is critical to note that the concept of social capital refers to much more than the factors taken into consideration by resource mobilization, rational choice, and relative deprivation theorists. Social capital encompasses feelings of trust and generalized reciprocity, which can exist regardless of the presence of concrete resources. Impoverished, marginalized citizens may be blessed with high levels of "bridging" social capital and thus be tolerant of diverse opinions and active in community affairs. Conversely, citizens with adequate resources may be lacking "bridging" social capital, yet remain strong in "bonding" social capital, resulting in strong feelings of enmity towards citizens belonging to other groups and disdain for inclusive modes of participation.

This conception of the impact of social capital on citizens' levels of trust and attitudes regarding what is "proper" participation leads to the following hypotheses:

- H1: Where high levels of "bridging" social capital are observed, citizens will be less likely to view political violence as justified.
- H2: Where high levels of "bonding" social capital are observed, citizens are more likely to view political violence as justified.
- H3: Where high levels of "bridging" social capital are observed, citizens will be less likely to have participated in system-challenging acts.
- H4: Where high levels of "bonding" social capital are observed, citizens will be more likely to have participated in system-challenging acts.

The social capital literature of the 1990s sheds new light on individual motivations of violent political participation. As political debate increasingly involves discussion of the benefits of community versus individuality, the impact of social capital introduces important theoretical considerations.

Design and Cases

This study employs the survey responses of over 19,000 citizens in 13 different countries in order to examine the relationship between social capital and attitudes regarding political violence. It is important to note that there are undoubtedly aggregate, country-level variables, such as political culture, history, and current events, which make political violence more prevalent in certain countries. This study examines individual-level motivations for political violence, however, and attempts to draw no conclusions about the effects of cultural or societal differences between cases.

In order to capture individual attitudes toward violent, system-challenging political participation, group membership, and bonding ties, I follow Pippa Norris, Russell Dalton, and Ken Newton by using the most recent 1995-1997 wave of the World Values Survey (ICPSR, 2000). The selection of cases follows *Contemporary Democracies: Participation, Stability, and Violence*, by G. Bingham Powell, the seminal, large scale cross-national study of political violence. Whenever possible, the same countries used by Powell are used. However, some countries have ceased to exist since Powell's work or were not included in the most recent wave of the World Values Survey. In these instances, the countries are omitted from the study.

Individual survey responses are taken from Britain, Germany (West and East), Spain, United States, Japan, Australia, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Switzer

land, India, Venezuela, Turkey, and Uruguay. In an empirical study of this magnitude, measures of statistical significance are less telling than substantive correlation coefficients (and the direction of those coefficients). The relationships of social capital variables to individual attitudes are broadly applicable due to the sheer size of the sample involved.

Dependent Variables

Two variables included in this survey capture attitudes towards using political violence and participation in system-challenging acts. The first variable 164 in the World Values Survey, reads:

How strongly do you agree or disagree with this statement: "Using violence to pursue political goals is never justified."

The second dependent variable is an item in a sequence of variables describing types of participation. It reads:

Tell me, for each one whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it: Occupying a building or factory.

The first of these survey questions identifies individual attitudes toward violent political participation. The second identifies actual participation as well as attitudes toward system-challenging acts. Testing the impact of several social capital indices on the aforementioned variables will determine the impact of bridging and bonding social capital on these variables.

Operationalizing Social Capital

To conceptualize social capital as a resource that can be measured, I follow Robert Putnam, using levels of group membership and feelings of generalized trust for bridging indicators, and the importance of family, ethnic self-identification, and town size for bonding indicators. The bridging social capital index is a construction of citizens' levels of generalized trust and community involvement, while the bonding index is a more subtle construction of individual loyalties and expected attitudes.

The bridging social capital index combines a question indicating individual levels of generalized trust with an index of group membership. The trust variable reads:

Generally, speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?

Responses to this question are indicative of generalized trust; that is, trust in other citizens in general as opposed to trust in only individuals the respondent associates with. This is an important indicator of social capital because generalized trust is the ostensible goal of bridging social capital. The presence of generalized trust suggests that citizens have internalized the norms of proper democratic participation. Recent literature suggests that individual-level feelings of interpersonal trust are not related to institutional trust, and by extension may not be related to one's attitudes regarding system challenging acts (Newton and Norris, 1999). However, although trust is an output of strong bridging social capital, its existence alone does not indicate the existence of social capital. Social capital also consists of activities that breed norms regulating peaceful democratic participation, societal interaction, and discourse. A comprehensive conceptualization of bridging social capital must include more than simply generalized trust.

This missing ingredient is found in individuals' membership in voluntary organizations. Voluntary membership builds bridging social capital by uniting disparate groups of citizens toward a common goal, teaching the norms of participation that underlie a functioning democracy. Therefore, an index is constructed based on successive survey questions asking for individuals' level of engagement in several voluntary associations:

Now I am going to read off a list of voluntary associations; for each one, could you tell me whether you are an active member, an inactive member, or not a member of that type of organization?

- Church or religious organization
- Sport or recreation organization
- Art, music, or educational association
- Environmental organization
- Professional association
- Charitable organization
- Any other voluntary organization

Respondents are placed on a continuum from 0 to 1, with 0 representing no membership in any of the seven mentioned organizations, and 1 representing active membership in each.

To combine the two components of bridging social capital, an index is constructed giving the important societal output of generalized trust equal weight as the voluntary membership index. The result is a continuum of bridging social capital, ranging from 0 to 1.

Figure 2. Bridging Social Capital Index

0= Low Bridging Social Capital	1 =High Bridging Social Capital
Low trust, no involvement in voluntary organizations.	High general trust, active membership in all voluntary organizations.

Table 2. Survey wording of potential indicators of Bonding Social Capital

INDICATIVE OF	SURVEY WORDING:
Family Loyalties	Please say, for each of the following how important is it in your life. V4 Family same as above V5 Friends
Friend Loyalties	
Distrust of out-group	Could you please sort out any people you would not <i>like to</i> have as neighbors? V52 <i>People of a different race</i>
Loyalty to geographic grouping	To which of <i>these geographical</i> groups do you belong to first? Locality or town, State or Region, Country, Continent, <i>the world as a whole?</i> - V203
Ethnic Loyalty	Which of the following best describes you? Above all I am a [ethnic minority] or I am an [citizen ID] ID] first and a member of some ethnic group second- V208
Size of town	V232 - Different groupings smallest to largest.

In order to conceptualize an index that truly measures bonding social capital, one must understand the relationship between various indicators of this "dark side" of social capital. As mentioned before, valuing family, having ethnic pride, and living in a small community does not necessarily make an individual more

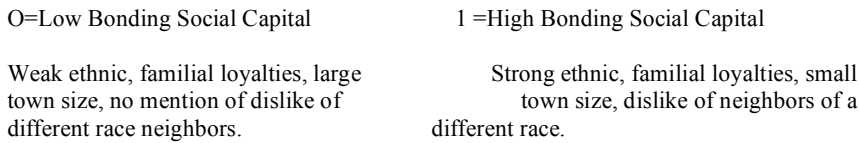
likely to support using political violence. There is a synergistic effect, however, in the combination of these variables that results in a veritable boiling pot of primordial loyalties. Factor analysis isolates potential bonding social capital variables, identifying which ones are tied together by some underlying principle. Several variables tended to cluster together, suggesting that they are driven by the type of primordial loyalties underlying bonding social capital.

Table 3. Factor Analysis Results

Component	Relations	Ethnicity	Insularity	
family import.	.722	-.180	.125	
friends import.	.734	.137	-.07402	
neighbors diff race		-.142	-.779	.178
ethnic nat/id	-.216	.649	.278	
geo. group	-.02567	.08568	-.617	
size of town	.01225	.128	.735	

As table 3 illustrates, three component extractions showed that the importance of family and friends moved together; aversion to neighbors of a different race and ethnic self-identification moved together; and finally geographic identification and size of town moved together. I use the trends illustrated by this data to construct an index of bonding social capital (Figure 3) for comparison to the bridging social capital index. Family importance and ethnic ID are direct indicators of bonding ties, whereas town size and neighbors of a different race are hypothetical indicators of bonding social capital. Therefore, the first two variables are weighted more heavily than the latter two.

Figure 3. Bonding Social Capital Index



As Table 5 shows, examining the relationships between social capital indices and individuals' propensity to occupy a building or factory in protest yields results counter to my hypotheses.

Table 5. Bivariate Correlations

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Occupying a Building/Factory

Bridging Index .098**

Bonding Index -.055**

Significant at their I level. Coefficients are Pearson's Coefficient.

The relationships presented in Table 5 tend to counter the hypothesis that high bridging social capital deters individuals from occupying a building or factory while high bonding social capital makes individuals more likely to occupy a building or factory. Quite the opposite: the higher the bridging social capital index, the more *likely* individuals are to occupy a building, while a higher bonding social capital index makes individuals slightly *less likely* to occupy a building in protest. This suggests that occupying a building may be an act that lies within the boundaries of the "new protest politics" described by resource mobilization theorists. The more involved people are in voluntary organizations and the more trusting they are, the more likely they are to join in unconventional participation by occupying a building.

To establish what relationship the control variables of age, income, and education level have on the dependent variable, I employ bivariate analyses. Based on conventional wisdom and on the predictions of relative deprivation and rational choice theory, one would expect that as age, income, and education increase, individuals would be *less likely* to support political violence or engage in violent system-challenging acts.

Table 6. Bivariate Correlations 3

Control Variable	Using Violence	Occupy a building
Income	-.058**	.057**
Age	-.006	-.026**
Education Level	-.018*	.124**

**Significant at .01. *Significant at .05. Pearson's Coefficient.

Results vary in Table 6, but all associations between the control variables and the dependent variables are weak. Age does not appear to be significantly associated with attitudes toward the use of violence for political means, but does display an inverse relationship with individuals' propensity to occupy a building in protest. The higher individuals' incomes, the less *likely he/she* is to support using violence for political goals and the more *likely that* person is to occupy a building or factory. Likewise, the higher an individual's education level, the *less likely* he/she is to support using violence but *the more* likely that person is to join in occupying a building.

These results are consistent with expected relationships regarding attitudes towards using political violence. Similar to preliminary relationships established with social capital variables, however, the direction of education and income coefficients support Dalton's thesis that higher educated and affluent citizens are more likely to join in protest activities, including occupying a budding or factory.

Controlling for Variables - Multiple Regression Analysis

Again, although bivariate analysis yields interesting results regarding the relationships between social capital, age, income, and education levels and the propensity to occupy a building or support the use of political violence, the results say nothing of the isolated effects of these variables. Multiple regression analysis of bridging and bonding social capital, age, education, and income provide a more complete view of the relative strength of these characteristics.

Measuring the effects of income, education, age, and bridging social capital against individual attitudes towards the use of violence for political means demonstrates that social capital may have an important impact when controlling for demographics.

Table 7. Regression Analysis of Political Violence Variable

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients
RI=.009		
Income	-.01793**	-.051**
Age	.00007064	.003
Education Level	.007247	ON
Bridging Social Capital	-.249**	-.076**

According to Table 7, age is not a significant contributor to the model's explanatory power, while education and income are weakly associated with changes

in individual attitudes toward using violence. Bridging social capital holds the strongest coefficient in relation to individual attitudes towards using violence. *Ceteris paribus*, a one point decrease in one's bridging social capital index yields a 25% increase in that individual's support for political violence. That is to say, a onequarter incremental decrease of the social capital index results in moving an entire response toward believing political violence is justifiable.

Bridging social capital also offers the strongest coefficient in regards to individuals' propensity to occupy a building or factory, again supporting the claim of *resource mobilization* that the more active citizens are in organizations, the more likely they are to join in protests.

Table 8. Regression Analysis of Occupying a Building/Factory Variable

	Unstandardized <i>Coefficients</i>	Standardized <i>Coefficients</i>
Income	-.0006301	-.004
Age	-.0002948**	-.030**
Education level	.01948**	.108**
Bridging Social Capital	.126**	.081**

**Correlation significant at .01 level.

Table 8 shows that holding age, income, and education constant, a one point increase in an individual's bridging social capital index results in a 13% increase on the scale that an individual has occupied, might occupy, or has never occupied a building in protest. Surprisingly, income is not significantly associated, and age, when controlling for other variables, does not have a strong impact on the likelihood of an individual occupying a building. The most important control variable in this case is education level, which has a very slight positive relationship with the propensity to occupy a building in protest.

Controlling for demographic variables also provides telling insight into the strength of bonding social capital in influencing attitudes toward using political violence. Holding all *else* constant, a one point increase in one's bonding social capital index yields a 15% increase in one's likelihood of supporting political violence.

Table 9 shows that age again has little impact on individual attitudes regarding violent political activity. Education has a very slight positive relationship, while income is inversely related to support for using violence, as expected. The

positive direction of education is so slight that it may be an idiosyncrasy of the data. The relative strength of bonding social capital indicates that strong in-group ties may lead to the belief that using violence for political goals is justified.

Testing the relationship of bonding social capital with individual attitudes toward occupying a building in protest yields results consistent with resource mobilization theorists' claims. A one point increase in the bonding social capital index results in a 13% decrease in the likelihood that the individual join in occupying a building in protest. Education has a slight positive relationship, indicating that more educated individuals do indeed join protest activities at a higher rate. Income and age are very weakly associated with the dependent variable.

Table 9. Regression Analysis of Political Violence Variable

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients
R ² = .008		
Income	-.03375**	-.088**
Age	.00001075	.001
Education Level	.001356**	.034**
Bonding Social Capital	.150*	.033**

*Correlation significant at the .01 level.

Table 10. Regression Analysis of Occupying a Building/Factory Variable

	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients
R ² = .015		
Income	-.004502	-.025
Age	.000354**	-.036
Education Level	.01436**	.079**
Bonding Social Capital	-.130**	-.060**

*Correlation is significant at the .01 level

Holding other variables constant, Table 10 shows that bonding social capital makes individuals *less likely* to join in protest politics such as occupying a

building or factory. When controlling for other demographics and social capital indicators, income and age prove to have little explanatory power. The coefficient of the education variable consistently, albeit very weakly, supports resource mobilization theorists claims that the higher educated are more likely to join in protest politics.

The relationships presented above are based on imperfect data in the sense that they examine the theoretical link between societal level social capital and societal level political violence by examining individual attitudes. The models described have very low overall goodness of fit measures, likely because the relationship between civil society, demographics, and political violence and protest activity is extremely intricate. Future empirical study should be careful to include other telling variables, such as measures of political history, culture, ideological orientation and ethnic fragmentation. The above models do, however, provide an important starting point for discussing the link between different forms of social capital and citizens' propensity to engage in protest politics and political violence.

Conclusions

Although political scientists such as Russell Dalton seem partially correct in their descriptions of a "new citizen politics," resource mobilization theorists fail to explain attitudes on the extreme end of the participation continuum. In particular, the more civically *engaged citizens* are, the *less likely* they are to view violence as a justifiable means of pursuing political goals. However, findings support resource mobilization theory in that high levels of bridging social capital may be associated with protesting by occupying a building or factory. We can conclude that as citizens become more trustful of one another and more active in voluntary organizations, they may tend to internalize norms discouraging the use of violence. Coinciding with the internalization of norms regarding violence, it seems that as citizens become more trusting and involved they become "joiners" in unconventional participation.

Robert Putnam is correct to make the distinction between bridging and bonding social capital; high levels of bonding social capital may have negative consequences for attitudes regarding the use of political violence. Likewise, high levels of bonding social capital may discourage individuals from joining in inclusive forms of protest activity like occupying a building. It is probable that as individuals become more involved with familial and ethnic ties, they are less likely to join in activities that unite them with other citizens. At the same time, exclusionary bonding ties likely breed distrust of "the other," leading to attitudes that violence is an appropriate alternative to inclusive forms of participation.

Social capital, embodied by generalized trust, voluntary activity, and ingroup ties, appears to have important consequences for individual level attitudes towards using violence for political goals and individuals' propensity to join in

system-challenging acts. Social capital comes with mixed blessings, depending on the relative strength of its bonding and bridging components. This empirical evidence brings a new dimension to the examination of the growing trend of popular dissatisfaction with conventional participation. Attitudes regarding political violence appear to be tied to how citizens regard themselves and each other, as well as how they view modes of participation.

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