**Does national social capital make individual citizens better democrats?**

Jan W. van Deth and Kateřina Vráblíková

University of Mannheim, Charles University and Academy of Sciences Czech Republic

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Abstract

Although social capital and its consequences have been widely studied as individual features, a much more challenging approach depicts social capital primarily on the societal level as a collective good characterizing cultural properties of distinct societies. Understood as a macro-level phenomenon social capital provides a social and cultural environment that influence individual citizen’s attitudes and behaviour*.* It is considered to be a crucial collective resource that holds societies together and enables effective cooperation among citizens, increases their public involvement, political participation, and political trust. The main question of this study is: How do individual and national levels of social capital influence individual citizens in Western democracies? The study examines a bunch of citizens’ activities and attitudes generally regarded as good for democracy: interest in politics, political discussions, electoral and non-electoral political participation, political trust, and satisfaction with democracy. The impact of individual and collective social capital on these individual attitudes and behaviour using ISSP 2004 data from Western democracies is explored. For collective social capital both aggregate data on social trust and group membership in a particular country (WVS) and macro indicators on the level of collective social capital and the quality of civil society is used. Multilevel modelling enables us to disentangle the effects of collective, macro- and micro-level determinants. The analyses show that living in a country rich on social capital contributes to democratic attitudes and behaviour beyond the effects of personal social capital. Moreover, environment richer on collective social capital activates individual social capital more to produce democratic values and political behaviour.

1. Introduction

Social capital is expected to have a vast number of positive effects on democratic citizenship. It should increase voter turnout, interest in politics, political trust, support for democracy etc. Although political scientists have in theory conceptualized social capital mainly as a collective phenomenon, which characterises societies and not only a property of individuals, most of the empirical evidence relies on individual level analyses. However, the existing dramatic differences in the level of collective social capital and in the effects of individual social capital across countries suggest that social capital understood contextually might matter. The goal of this study is to examine social capital as a collective good at the macro-level and show how it is related to the effect of the individual level social capital. Specifically, we ask: How do distinct levels of social capital – at the individual and macro-level – affect political orientations and behaviour of citizens in Western democracies?

In order to disentangle the political consequences of different levels of social capital we will, firstly, differentiate between individual and macro-level conceptualisations of social capital and theorize the various mechanisms presumed to influence political orientations and behaviour. While individual social capital increases support for democratic attitudes and behaviour only of those people, who possess it, the collective social capital should motivate all citizens to “make democracy work”. The reason is that the collective social capital understood as a social and cultural environment decreases transaction costs of collective engagement and compliant behaviour for everybody beyond his or her personal level of social capital. However, we can still expect that environment characterised by more social capital will make it easier for people scoring high on individual social capital to transform their personal social capital into democratic attitudes and behaviour than for people personally lacking social capital.

We test this theory on a bunch of citizens’ activities and attitudes generally regarded as conditions for a vibrant and stable democracy are examined: interest in politics, political discussions, electoral and non-electoral political participation, political trust, and democratic values. Since we theorize about the effect of different levels of social capital, multilevel regression models were estimated on International Social Survey Programme (ISSP, 2004) data from 38,366 individuals living in 29 democracies. This individual level data was supplemented with appropriate country level indicators, particularly the aggregated measure of social capital and global measure of social capital that is used as a robustness check. In general, the results show support for the theoretical distinction between individual and collective social capital. In agreement with the theory, collective social capital motivates people to engage in “making democracy work” beyond their personal level of social capital. In addition to directly promoting citizens’ democratic attitudes and voting, higher level of collective social capital also amplifies the effect of individual social capital.

2. The many faces of social capital

Twenty years after Robert Putnam ([1993](#_ENREF_10)) presented his seminal work on democracy the idea that cultural factors are highly relevant for a vibrant democracy has been widely accepted. In this view the crucial role of trust and confidence for the efficient production of collective goods in a society is emphasized. Especially Neo-Tocquevillean approaches point out to institutionalized social contacts and networks – usually voluntary associations – as the main sources of trust, confidence, and democratic norms and values. Combining these concepts the term ‘social capital’ is used to refer to “... features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” ([Putnam, 1993](#_ENREF_10)). On this basis, most authors define two crucial dimensions of social capital: cultural aspects, which include mainly trust and confidence, and structuralaspects, which cover mainly activities in institutionalised networks such as voluntary associations (cf. [Coleman, 1990](#_ENREF_3); [Esser, 2008](#_ENREF_4)).

The expected benign effects of social capital are anything but modest: “... social capital makes us smarter, healthier, safer, richer, and better able to govern a just and stable democracy” ([Putnam, 2000](#_ENREF_11)). Various authors include under consequences of social capital outcomes ranging from personal benefits, such as getting a good job, promotions, economic resources, over higher political participation and support for democracy, to effectiveness of democratic institutions and economic development (Stolle, 2007). For instance, Putnam (1995, 2000) argues that the decline of social capital is in the US responsible for the withdrawal of people from political and civic engagement. In a nutshell, according to the theory, social capital should contribute to a number of outcomes positive for a democracy, such as higher political interest, political trust and support for democracy and political participation.

In addition to other conceptual differences, authors mainly differ in specification of the locus of social capital ([Esser, 2008](#_ENREF_4)). On one hand, social capital can be conceived as a property of individuals. This perspective, which mainly draws on sociological understanding of social capital (Bourdieu, Coleman, Lin), finds social capital in social relations and networks between individuals or their groups. (van Deth 2003, Stolle 2007, Edwards 2009). Involvement in social networks makes various types of resources and goods easily available and hence helps promote individual political behaviour and democratic values of individuals embedded in these networks.

On the other hand, social capital can also be understood as a collective good, by definition available to each citizen (Stolle and Rochon 1998, Norris 2002, Newton 2001, van Deth 2002, 2003): “... if social capital is anything, it is a societal not an individual property, and should be studied as a social or collective phenomenon, not at the individual level as if it were a property of isolated citizens” ([Newton, 2001](#_ENREF_8)). This collective perspective on social capital falls under the political culture tradition of Almond and Verba (1963), who stress the role of culture as a characteristic of a political system, which is exogenous to individuals. Hence social capital is not an attribute of a particular individual but exists on the societal level. It is a “macropolitical” concept that can affect the realm of micropolitics, consisting of individual attitudes within the political structure (Almond and Verba 1963). Taken from the perspective of the individual, social capital is the environment in which she lives and possibly influences her attitudes and behaviour.

Reflecting this distinction between micro and macro perspective on social capital, however, does not imply the need to opt for one conceptualisation and reject the other. Social capital can be relevant for political orientations and behaviour both at the individual level (by expanding resources and contacts available) and at the societal level (by offering opportunities to every member of a society) and these two levels can even possibly influence each other. There does not seem any a priori argument to restrict our explorations of the impact of social capital – all we need is a to “…take a stand on a critical question, to wit: whose capital is at issue: that of the individual or the community?” ([Inkeles, 2000](#_ENREF_5)).

Available empirical evidence has not provided answer to this question. Most of the studies of the impact of social capital for democracy have usually focused on the individual-level mechanisms: socially active citizens will be more trusting and have more confidence in politics, therefore will be more supportive of democracy and willing to be politically engaged. Specifically, the studies have examined the individual level relationships between personal social capital, i.e. voluntary groups membership and social trust, and political participation (Norris 2002, Kaase 1999, Benson and Rochon 2004, Selingson 1999, Lake, Huckfeldt 1998), political interest (van Deth 2000), political trust and support for democracy (Gabriel, Walter-Rogg 2008, Bäck, Kestilä 2008).

Studies conceptualizing social capital as a country-level characteristic have mostly a form of one country studies (Putnam and Goss 2002) or provide bivariate correlation evidence either on the over-time trends in social capital and trends in political participation (Putnam 2000, 1993) or show cross-sectional correlations on the regional or national level between social capital and voter turnout (Putnam 2000, Newton 1999, van Deth 2002, Benson and Rochon 2004, but see Keele 2007).

However, there has not been any study that have examined social capital as a collective good at the macro-level providing a social and cultural environment influencing individual citizen’s attitudes and behaviour and influencing the role played by their individual level social capital*.* As reviewed above, only individual level analyses compared across a small number of countries or fully aggregate level analyses are available. The interplay between how social capital as a characteristic of a political system influences individual participants and the role played by their personal social capital remains largely understudied.

Similarly, although a large number of studies analysing how context affects individual political behaviour and attitudes have recently appeared, vast majority of these studies have been limited to the examination of political institutions and economic development and have overlooked the role of national culture (Dalton, Anderson 2011, Dalton, van Sicle, Weldon 2009, Christensen 2013, Kittilson, Schwindt-Bayer 2007, van der Meer, van Deth, Scheepers, 2009, but see Welzel and Deutsch 2012). However, as Almond and Verba (1963: 3) pointed out almost fifty years ago, “If the democratic model of the participatory state is to develop (…), it will require more than the formal institutions of democracy”.

This study addresses just this gap in our knowledge on how the two different conceptual levels of social capital – individual and collective – affect democratic attitudes and political behaviour of individual citizens. The cross-national differences in levels of both individual- and macro-level social capital and the effect of individual social capital on democratic attitudes and behaviour are impressive and seem to provide a promising starting point for explanations of equally impressive cross-national differences in support for democratic political orientations and in political participation. Following sections will specify in more detail the theoretical expectations on why and how individual and collective social capital affects democratic attitudes and political participation and what the expected interplay between the two distinct types of social capital is.

2.1. Individual level social capital

A first set of our expectations about the impact of social capital on citizens’ democratic attitudes and political behaviour is based on the conceptualisation of social capital as an individual property. In summary, the expected mechanism of how individual social capital facilitated democratic values and political behaviour of individuals possessing it emphasises development of social trust within voluntary organizations that these people further transfer beyond the borders of their networks into the political realm and have higher political trust, are more interested in politics and participate more.

More specifically, it is especially authors working in the tradition of Alexis de Tocqueville who point to the relevance of voluntary associations to strengthen cooperation and collective decision-making without threats, violence or power. Voluntary associations bring people in touch with each other on a regular basis. As a consequence, they will develop skills and competences to collaborate as well as mutual trust and pro-social norms (“contact hypothesis”). Although other social contacts – family, neighbours etc. – might have similar consequences, voluntary associations offer institutionalised contacts on a regular basis and are, therefore, more likely to strengthen skills and pro-social norms.

Social capital conceptualised as an individual property results in a decrease of transaction costs for the people involved because, in trustful relationships, fewer resources are required to guarantee compliance than in other contacts. Citizens with relatively high levels of individual social capital (that is, citizens engaged in voluntary associations and showing high levels of personal trust) will be more willing to “Make democracy work” than people confronted with higher opportunity costs in their direct social environment. A more critical approach, stressing the fact that individuals with high levels of social capital simply can afford to enter potentially risky arrangements ([Newton, 2001](#_ENREF_8)), results in the same expectation. Our first set of hypotheses, then, deals with the expected consequences of social capital at the individual level:

H1a: Citizens with relatively high levels of individual level social capital, will also show relatively high levels of support for democratic attitudes.

H1b: Citizens with relatively high levels of individual level social capital, will also show relatively high levels of political participation.

2.2. Collective social capital

Moving from the individual to the macro-level the expected mechanism of the contextual influence effect of the social capital is that the advantages of social capital are available to all citizens embedded in the same context irrespective their individual level of social capital. The general availability of a dense and active civil society offers easy access to trustful relationships and all kinds of networks, lowering the opportunity costs for engagement and compliant behaviour for all citizens in this society. Hence in contrast to individual social capital, in the case of collective social capital the transaction costs of cooperation and collective action are decreased for everybody and not only for people involved in networks, because fewer resources are required to guarantee compliance (van Deth 2002, Jordana 1999). As van Deth explains (2002), “You don’t even have to be a member of one single organization or show a real minimum level of trust in other people in order to profit from the fact that in this society the transaction costs are low for every contact or contract you encounter.” Moreover, if social capital is widely available for everybody people will be much more willing to contribute to the production of collective goods than in societies were trust and networks are less developed because they can expect the system to be more responsive to their efforts.[[1]](#footnote-1) On this basis we can expect:

H2a: The higher the macro-level of social capital in a society, the higher the level of support for democratic attitudes is.

H2b: The higher the macro-level level of social capital in a society, the higher the level of political participation is.

2.3. Interplay between micro and macro level social capital

Previous section has specified expectations regarding independent effects of individual and collective social capital. The point here is to examine whether the two types of social capital have additive effect on democratic attitudes and political behaviour. This will show whether the two types of social capital are empirically two different phenomena or whether there is no empirical difference between the two conceptual levels and the effect of one type is taken by the other type.

In addition to these independent (additive) effects of individual and collective social capital, we can expect also multiplicative effects; which means that one type of social capital can condition the effect of the other type. Specifically, we can expect that it should be easier to transform personal social capital into democratic attitudes and political participation in more supportive conditions, i.e. environment generally richer on social capital. In other words, a person possessing high personal social capital will be much more willing to contribute to the collective goods, such as political participation and support for democratic attitudes, in national context rich on social capital, because it will be much easier and more effective, than if she was to contribute in environment characterised by low social capital. Under unsupportive conditions, i.e. context where collective social capital is low, people will not invest their personal social capital into collective actions and goods that much. On this basis, we can expect that:

H3a: The impact of the individual-level social capital on the level of support for democratic attitudes is stronger if the macro-level social capital is higher.

H4b: The impact of the individual-level social capital on the level of political participation is stronger is stronger if the macro-level social capital is higher.

3. Data and Methods

3.1. Individual level social capital

Individual level social capital is measured by two variables indicating voluntary group membership and social trust. ISSP 2004 covers five items indicating activity in voluntary groups – trade unions, church groups, sports and cultural groups, political party or group, and others. Involvement in the organizations and groups is measured on a four-value scale: active member, inactive member, former member, and non-member. The individual items form a single dimension of a group membership. Factor analysis (Principal component method) performed on these five items indicating activity in groups on the total sample showed that the individual variables create one component (trade unions = .59, church groups = .54, sports and cultural groups = .69, political party or group = .51, other groups= .71). The individual items were counted and divided by five. The additive index ranges from 0 to 4.

Social trust is measured as an index compiling answers to the statements “People can be generally trusted” and “How often will people try to cheat on you?” The measure ranges from 1 to 5; higher values indicate more trust. The reliability of this scale is Cronbach Alpha=0.53.

3.2. Macro level social capital

In order to provide more robust evidence on the effect of collective social capital we use two equivalent measures of collective social capital. Following the seminal work of Lazarsfeld and Menzel ([1962](#_ENREF_6)) we distinguish two indicators that correspond to their distinction between analytical and global types of contextual variables. First, we measure social capital as analytical property by aggregating features of individual citizens of a particular country. Following conceptual understanding of political culture in the tradition of Almond and Verba (1963) as the distribution of attitudes in the political system, we measure collective social capital as a combined measure of a distribution of social trust and group membership in the particular society. Specifically, country level factor analysis on data from the three waves of the World Value Survey (WVS) before 2004 indicating percentage of people, who are members at least at one group, and percentage of people, who trusted others, was performed (see Inglehart and Welzel 2005). Then individual items (percentages of the two variables per country in the fourth or latest available wave of the WVS) were weighted by the factor loadings from the factor analysis and divided by the sum of the factor loadings. The resulting measure is a percentage of people with social capital in a given country (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

As a robustness check the analysis uses also “global” measure of social capital, which does is not a result of aggregation, but is a characteristic of the political system per se. Specifically, we use the measure indicating the Strength of Civil Society developed within Global Civil Society Project (CIVICUS, Anheier et al. 2003). This measure strongly correlates with our aggregated measure of social capital at the level .84. We use the Strength of Civil Society measure as robustness check to our aggregated measure because it is available only for 19 countries out of 28 for which we have the aggregated measure available.

3.3. Dependent Variables

Since social capital is theorized to have benign effect on a number of people’s political attitudes and behaviour, the analyses will test its effect on the main indicators of democratic citizenship: Voting, non-electoral participation, political engagement, political trust and satisfaction with democracy.

Political engagement: Political engagement captures the attention people pay to politics (Martín and van Deth 2007). Indicator of political engagement is constructed as a summated rating scale combining three variables: political interested measured by the question “how much are you interested in politics”, and political discussion measured by the questions on the frequency of political discussion with others, and attempting to convince others of one’s political opinion measured. All of the three variables are measured on four-value scale and Principal Component Analysis reveals that they form one component (political interest = .81, political discussion = .87, political convincing = .81). The individual items were added and divided by three. The final additive index ranges from 0 to 4. The reliability of this scale is Cronbach Alpha=0.77. The Intra-class Correlation Coefficient (ICC), which indicates amount of variation in the variable that can be attributed to potential contextual effects is 8 %.

Voting: Voting is indicated by question on turnout in last elections. 1 means that the person took part at the elections, 0 means all other respondents.

Non-electoral participation: Non-electoral participation is indicated by a summated rating index adding performance of political activities in last 12 months: signing a petition, taking part in a demonstration, attending a political meeting or rally, contacting a political or a civil servant to express one’s views, donating money or raising funds for a social or political activity, boycotted or deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons, contacting or appearing in the media to express one’s views. The Principal Component Analysis (PCA) using tetrachoric inter-item correlations (as the data is nominal level) extracted a single factor (signing a petition = .72, taking part in a demonstration = .72, attending a political meeting or rally = .80, contacting a political or a civil servant to express one’s views = .76, donating money or raising funds for a social or political activity = .68, boycotted or deliberately bought certain products for political, ethical or environmental reasons = .68, contacting or appearing in the media to express one’s views = .74). The individual items were added and divided by seven. The index of non-electoral participation ranges from 0 to 1.The ICC is 13 %.

Satisfaction with democracy: Satisfaction with democracy is an evaluation of how democracy works in a particular country will be studied. This item is measured on 10-point scale with higher values indicating higher satisfaction. The ICC is 21 %.

Political trust: Trust in politicians in general is measured as an additive index of two items measuring agreement with the statements “politicians can be trusted“ and “people are in politics only because of personal profit“. The measure ranges from 1 to 5, and higher values indicate more efficacy. The reliability of this scale is Cronbach Alpha=0.53. The ICC is 15 %.

3.4. Controls

At the individual level, this study includes standard socio-demographic factors as controls. Age is measured as a continuous variable. Education is indicated by years of schooling completed. Income is measured as family income and sex is coded as 1 for females.

At the country level we control for the economic development and democratic history in all models. Level of economic development is measured as a country’s GPD per capita (PPP US$) in 2003. The data were obtained from the International Monetary Fund. Democratic history is measured by the number of years the country has been democratic as of 2003. The data were obtained from the Democracy Time-series Data Database. We also include country level controls relevant for particular dependent variables, such as electoral system for voting, level of corruption for political trust, political opportunity structure for non-electoral participation etc.

3.5. Data

The study employs data from the ISSP (2004) citizenship module. This dataset has a wide range of democratic attitudes and political behaviour, and at the same time includes the largest number of western style liberal democracies in relatively modern societies. There are data from 38,366 individuals living in 29 democracies in North America, European Union member states, Norway, Switzerland, New Zealand, Australia, Taiwan, Japan, South Korea and Israel.

As the theory and data have multilevel structure, where individuals at the first level are nested in countries that represent the second level, multi-level modeling is employed (Gelman, Hill, 2006). Hypotheses H1a and H1b are modelled as direct individual level effect of social capital without any independent variables at the national level. Hypotheses H2a and H2b are modelled as direct contextual effect of collective social capital. Hypotheses H3a and H3b are tested as the interaction effects between individual level and collective measures of social capital.

To test whether the findings are robust and not the result of a few influential cases, several diagnostic analyses were performed. Following a strategy proposed by Van der Meer, Grotenhuis and Pelzer (2010) countries that were above critical thresholds of Cook’s D and DFBETA for the collective social capital were included as dummy variables in the final models estimated. Since in some cases the number of influential cases is very high, as final results we show models with the lowest number of influential cases possible and at the same time displaying the same results as the models with all of the influential cases included.

4. The empirical consequences of social capital

Table 1 shows the results for voting and non-electoral participation; Table 2 shows the results for political engagement, political trust and satisfaction with democracy. Models I show the results for individual social capital plus controls only and Models II show results for collective social capital plus controls only. Models III test both, individual and collective, social capital together.

The first two rows of Models 1 in Table 1 and 2 show that both indicators of individual social capital have a significant positive effect on all of the dependent variables under study. These results support the part of the theory relying on the individual level mechanism, which argues that people individually possessing higher level of social capital will support more democratic values and be engaged more in politics (H1a and H1b). Although it is a classical expectation of social capital theory, not all studies have found support for these effects (Norris 2002, Armingeon 2007).

The third row of Models 2 in Tables 1 and 2 shows results for effect of the collective social capital without taking into account individual level social capital. The coefficients are with one exception significant positive thereby supporting H2a and H2b. In general, these results support the theoretical idea that social capital has impact also as a collective good, i.e. as a characteristic of external environment. In agreement with the theory, people living in national context richer on collective social capital have higher political trust, support democracy more, are more interested in politics and are more likely to vote. The theorized reason is that this environment lowers transaction costs of all of the citizens when they are to engage in collective action and production of collective goods and that they also perceive higher success of their efforts.

The only exception is non-electoral political participation. Collective social capital understood as environment does not affect individual participation in non-electoral politics. This corresponds to findings from other studies that explain this finding with consensual and cooperational character of social capital and hence the lack of competitive component, which is necessary for non-electoral participation (Vrablikova 2013).

Models 3 test whether the results on the effects of collective social capital are actually independent contextual effects or if they can be reduced to the effect of individual-level social capital. The general finding holding across all of the dependent variables is that effects displayed in Models I and Models II remain more or less the same – both micro and macro social capital have significant positive effect on almost all of the dependent variables. This means that the effect of collective social capital is not mediated by individual level social capital. Collective social capital increases democratic norms and participation beyond the effect of individual social capital. This finding supports the general political culture perspective that social capital, as the distribution of cultural traits at the level of political system, is conceptually different than individual level cultural effects. People benefit from the level of social capital in their environment regardless their personal level of social capital.

– Table 1 and 2 –

How do individual and collective social capital interact in their effects on democratic values and behaviour? The theory section speculated that context characterised by higher level of social capital should amplify the effect of the individual level social capital because people are more willing to invest their personal social capital in this more supportive environment where costs to do so are lower and possible gains higher.

To examine this expectation a series of models testing interaction effects between individual level social capital variables and collective social capital were run. Figure 1 shows the estimated marginal effects derived on the basis of these models. We can see that most of the results support this expectation (H3a and H3b). The effects of both indicators of individual social capital, i.e. social trust and group membership, on voting, non-electoral participation, political trust and democratic satisfaction get stronger the higher the level of collective social capital. In other words, if a person is surrounded by environment richer on social capital her individual social capital will be activated more to produce more democratic attitudes and political behaviour than if the same person resided in countries characterised by lower level of collective social capital.

Important finding is also the fact that in most of the cases, micro social capital still matters even in context that displays the lowest level of collective social capital. With the exception of the effect of group membership and democratic satisfaction, all of the figures show that even at the minimum level of collective social capital the effects of micro social capital variables are positive and significant (i.e. distinguishable from zero). This has important theoretical and policy implications since this means that in order to “make democracy work” personal social capital is not deactivated and still can make a difference even in unsupportive environment.

The only exception that does not support the theoretical expectations about the conditioning effect is political engagement. In contrast to the theory and other dependent variables, the effect of collective social capital on the effect of micro social capital on political engagement is negative, which is actually the opposite. In low collective social capital contexts, individual social capital increases political engagement much more than in environment rich on social capital. This holds for both indicators – group membership and social trust. From a different point of view this result also means that the gap in political interest between people possessing individual social capital and those who lack it is decreasing when there is more of collective social capital. Hence for political engagement collective social capital displays kind of equalizing effect.

– Figure 1 –

To check robustness of our findings the aggregated measure capturing collective social capital as analytical property was substituted with the global measure of collective social capital indicated by the Strength of Civil Society Index (not displayed). These analyses gave very similar results. As in the case of analytic measure, the global measure showed significant positive effect on voting and political trust and no effect on non-electoral participation. The coefficients did not reach statistical significance in the case of political engagement and satisfaction with democracy; however they were positive as in the case of the analytical measure, which is displayed in the paper.

5. Conclusions and discussion

Although social capital has been receiving tremendous research attention during the last 20 years, available comparative evidence on its actual political consequences has not been very supportive. While studies show positive effect of social capital on political participation and political trust mainly in the case of United States (Putnam 2000, Keele 2007), studies from other countries or cross-country comparative analyses mostly do not show support for this theory (Norris 2002, Armingeon 2007, van Deth 2002). The aim of this study was to contribute to the comparative perspective of how social capital matters. The main argument was that the conceptual distinction between different levels of social capital – individual and collective – should be taken seriously and examined also empirically since the two conceptualizations should have potentially different effects and might also influence each other.

Specifically, we expected that in addition to personal social capital understood as individual level good increasing democratic citizenship of people possessing it, also macro social capital understood as a collective good would contribute to higher democratic attitudes and participation of all citizens sharing the same environment regardless their level of personal social capital. The reason is that macro social capital understood as a collective good of the society is available to everybody so that transaction costs of contribution to the functioning of democracy are decreased for all citizens.

In general, the results showed support for this theory. First, we showed that collective social capital matters, i.e. higher level of collective social capital provides environment that promotes individual voting, political engagement, political trust and satisfaction with democracy. This holds even when other contextual factors such as economic development and political institutions are taken into account. Second, the results showed that collective social capital is really empirically different from the individual social capital since both of the measures displayed independent effects on individual democratic values and voting. Third, collective social capital also showed to provide supportive environment for the use of personal social capital. The positive interaction effects between individual and collective social capital mean that if one possesses personal social capital, it is then much easier for her to transform it into democratic attitudes and behaviour in environment characterised by higher level of collective social capital than in contexts poor on collective social capital. Fourth, the analysis has shown that the beneficial effects of both, individual and collective, social capital hold across a wide range of political outcomes. Both micro and macro social capital really “makes us” vote more, be more engaged in politics, trust more politicians and be more satisfied with democracy. The only exception is non-electoral participation for which social capital understood as context does not matter.

The findings presented in the foregoing pages have important implications for social capital theory and development of contemporary democracies. Current scholarship on social capital has underestimated the crucial role of social capital as a contextual determinant. Similarly, researchers of how context matters for democratic citizenship have limited their attention to the study of formal political institutions and economic development. However, as this study shows, socio-cultural environment of social capital has important consequences for how individual citizens behave in and evaluate democracy.

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**Table 1: Social Capital and Political Behaviour**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **VOTING** | | | | | | **NEP** | | | | | |
|  | **MODEL I** | | **MODEL II** | | **MODEL III** | | **MODEL I** | | **MODEL II** | | **MODEL III** | |
| **Micro Social Capital** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Group membership | .853  (.037) | \*\*\* |  |  | .846 (.037) | \*\*\* | .109 (.002) | \*\*\* |  |  | .109  (.002) | \*\*\* |
| Social trust | .262  (.031) | \*\*\* |  |  | .259 (.031) | \*\*\* | .016 (.002) | \*\*\* |  |  | .017 (.002) | \*\*\* |
| **Macro Social Capital** |  |  | .019 (.006) | \*\* | .020 (.007) | \*\* |  |  | .001 (.001) |  | .001 (.001) |  |
| **Controls individual level** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Gender | .053  (.035) |  | -.012  (.032) |  | .065 (.035) |  | .012  (.002) | \*\*\* | .004 (.002) |  | .012 (.002) | \*\*\* |
| Age | .036  (.001) | \*\*\* | .038  (.001) | \*\*\* | .035 (.001) | \*\*\* | -.001  (.001) | \*\*\* | -.001 (.001) | \*\*\* | -.001 (.001) | \*\*\* |
| Income | .001 (.001) | \* | .001 (.001) | \*\* | .001 (.001) | \* | .001  (.001) |  | .001 (.001) |  | .001 (.001) |  |
| Years of schooling | .059 (.005) | \*\*\* | .084 (.005) | \*\*\* | .059 (.005) | \*\*\* | .004  (.001) | \*\*\* | .008 (.001) | \*\*\* | .004 (.001) | \*\*\* |
| **Controls country level** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| GDP per Capita (PPP) |  |  | .001 (.001) |  | .001 (.001) |  |  |  | .001 (.001) |  | .001 (.001) |  |
| Democratic history |  |  | -.001 (.002) |  | -.008 (.006) |  |  |  | .001 (.001) |  | .001 (.001) |  |
| **Random effects** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Individual level | .571 | \*\*\* | .139 | \*\*\* | .154 | \*\*\* | .004 | \*\*\* | .001 | \*\*\* | .001 | \*\*\* |
| Contextual level |  |  |  |  |  |  | .025 | \*\*\* | .030 | \*\*\* | .026 | \*\*\* |
| Chi-square | 1722.51 | | 1336.62 | | 1716.02 | | 4720.54 | | 1468.18 | | 4789.11 | |
| N | 29/25878 | | 28/29708 | | 28/25138 | | 29/25147 | | 28/28107 | | 28/24434 | |

Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. The continuous factors are entered into the analysis as grand-centered. Family income is centered on country means. Contextual models of voting control also for the type of electoral system and effective number of political parties, and influential case: Australia, Czech Republic and USA. Contextual models of non-electoral participation control also for the number of veto players, self-expressive culture and influential cases of New Zealand, France and Spain.

† p≤.1, \* p≤.05, \*\* p≤.01, \*\*\* p≤.001

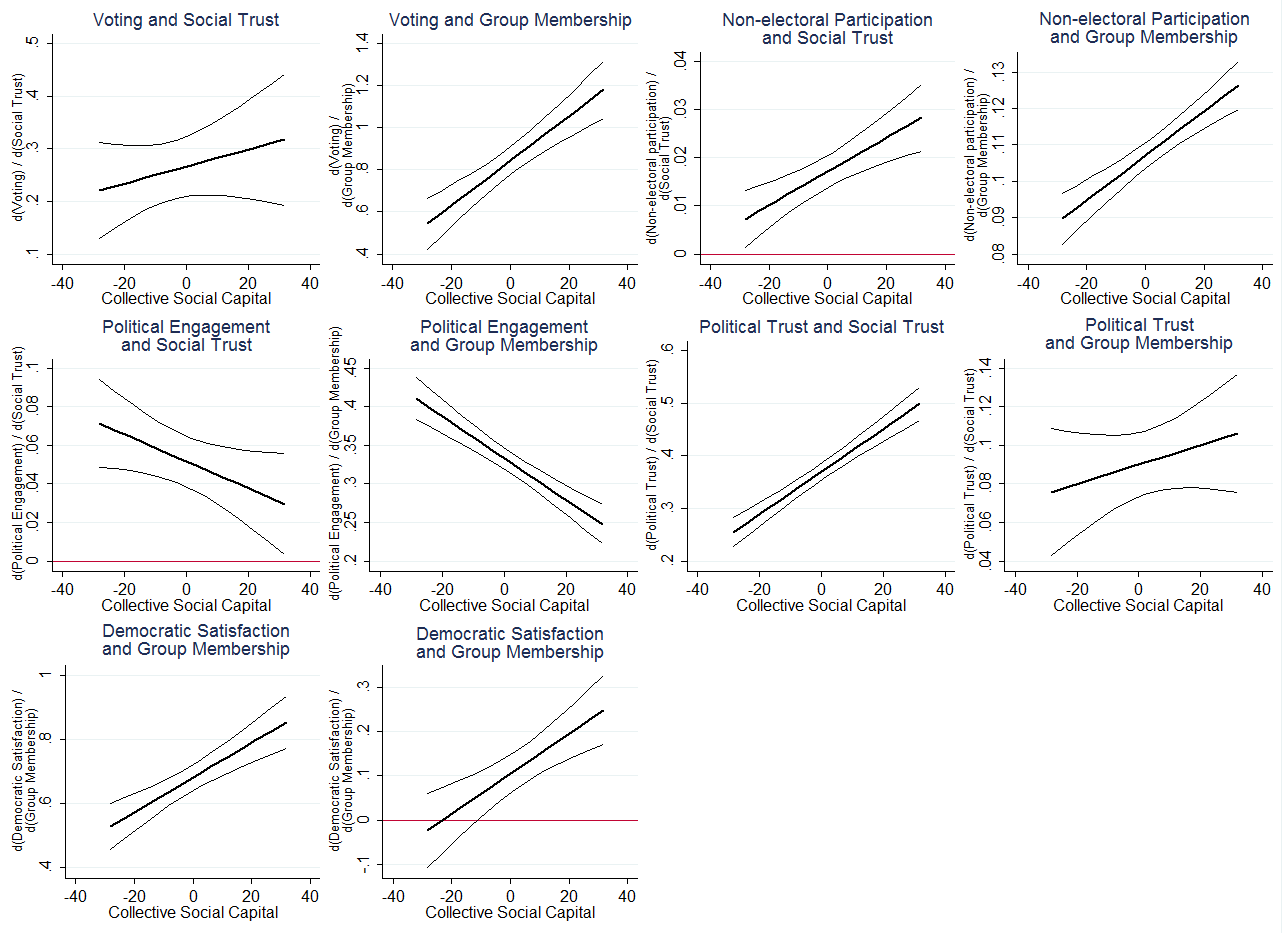
**Table 2: Social Capital and Democratic Attitudes**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | **POLITICAL ENGAGEMENT** | | | | | | **POLITICAL TRUST** | | | | | | **SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY** | | | | | |
|  | **MODEL I** | | **MODEL II** | | **MODEL III** | | **MODEL I** | | **MODEL II** | | **MODEL III** | | **MODEL I** | | **MODEL II** | | **MODEL III** | |
| **Micro Social Capital** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Group membership | .338  (.008) | \*\*\* |  |  | .324 (.008) | \*\*\* | .097 (.009) | \*\*\* |  |  | .094  (.009) | \*\*\* | .1211 (.023) | \*\*\* |  |  | .121 (.024) | \*\*\* |
| Social trust | .042  (.007) | \*\*\* |  |  | .053 (.007) | \*\*\* | .360 (.009) | \*\*\* |  |  | .364 (.009) | \*\*\* | .667 (.022) | \*\*\* |  |  | .675  (.023) | \*\*\* |
| **Macro Social Capital** |  |  | .004 (.002) | \*\*\* | .004 (.002) | \* |  |  | .004 (.003) | \* | .005 (.002) | \* |  |  | .016 (.008) | † | .013 (.008) | † |
| **Controls individual level** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Gender | -.194  (.008) | \*\*\* | -.213  (.008) | \*\*\* | -.186 (.008) | \*\*\* | .006  (.010) |  | -.010 (.009) |  | -.008 (.009) |  | -.194  (.025) | \*\*\* | -.194 (.024) | \*\*\* | -.209 (.025) | \*\*\* |
| Age | .002  (.001) | \*\*\* | .003  (.001) | \*\*\* | .002 (.001) | \*\*\* | .001  (.001) |  | -.001 (.001) | \*\*\* | .001 (.001) |  | .001  (.001) |  | .002 (.001) | \*\* | .001 (.001) |  |
| Income | .001 (.001) | \*\* | .001 (.001) | \*\*\* | .001 (.001) | \*\* | .001  (.001) | \*\* | .001 (.001) | \*\* | .001 (.001) | \*\* | .001  (.001) | \*\* | .001 (.001) | \*\*\* | .001 (.001) | \*\* |
| Years of schooling | .029 (.001) | \*\*\* | .036 (.001) | \*\*\* | .028 (.001) | \*\*\* | .004  (.001) | \*\* | .011 (.001) | \*\*\* | .004 (.001) | \*\* | .021  (.003) | \*\*\* | .034 (.003) | \*\*\* | .021 (.003) | \*\*\* |
| **Controls country level** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| GDP per Capita (PPP) |  |  | .001 (.001) |  | .001 (.001) |  |  |  | .001 (.001) |  | -.001 (.001) |  |  |  | .001 (.001) |  | .001 (.001) |  |
| Democratic history |  |  | .001 (.002) |  | .001 (.002) |  |  |  | .001 (.003) |  | .001 (.001) |  |  |  | -.001 (.001) |  | -.001 (.001) |  |
| **Random effects** |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| Individual level | .033 | \*\*\* | .013 | \*\*\* | .013 | \*\*\* | .084 | \*\*\* | .026 | \*\*\* | .025 | \*\*\* | .925 | \*\*\* | .173 | \*\*\* | .138 | \*\*\* |
| Contextual level | .430 | \*\*\* | .460 | \*\*\* | .426 | \*\*\* | .608 | \*\*\* | .654 | \*\*\* | .613 | \*\*\* | 3.936 | \*\*\* | 4.233 | \*\*\* | 4.011 | \*\*\* |
| Chi-square | 4615.50 | | 1336.62 | | 4337.99 | | 2080.51 | | 225.74 | | 2157.03 | | 1194.46 | | 409.82 | | 1376.54 | |
| N | 29/26807 | | 28/29708 | | 28/2601 | | 29/26317 | | 28/29906 | | 28/25655 | | 29/26232 | | 28/29832 | | 28/25488 | |

Unstandardized regression coefficients and standard errors in parentheses. The continuous factors are entered into the analysis as grand-centered. Family income is centered on country means. Contextual models of political engagement control for influential cases: France, Taiwan and Finland. Contextual models of political trust control also for the effective number of political parties, the number of veto players, corruption, and influential cases of Denmark. Contextual models of satisfaction with democracy control also for the effective number of political parties, the number of veto players, corruption, and influential cases of Bulgaria, Sweden, Denmark, and Israel.

† p≤.1, \* p≤.05, \*\* p≤.01, \*\*\* p≤.001

Figure 1: Marginal Effects of Individual Social Capital at Different Levels of Collective Capital



Note: The figure displays marginal effects of individual social capital on collective social capital and 90 per cent confidence intervals estimated from interaction Models.

1. Several authors have challenged this interpretation by referring to the fact that especially in advanced welfare states a “crowding-out” effect could have the opposite result when people withdraw from the production of collective goods exactly because civil society functions well ([van Oorschot and Arts, 2005](#_ENREF_18)). Since the empirical record does not clearly supports this interpretation we abstain from formulating rival hypotheses. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)