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Reviewed work(s):

Source: *Political Research Quarterly*, Vol. 60, No. 2 (Jun., 2007), pp. 192-201

Published by: [Sage Publications, Inc.](#) on behalf of the [University of Utah](#)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4623821>

Accessed: 12/12/2012 22:27

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The Third Face of Social Capital

How Membership in Voluntary Associations Improves Policy Accountability

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This article examines whether political accountability—the heart of a functioning democracy—is enhanced by citizen participation in voluntary associations. The authors contend that involvement in associations offers an easy avenue for acquiring political information, thereby aiding citizens in evaluating the president on the basis of the policies produced by the president. General Social Survey data from ten years, paired with presidential policy liberalism scores, are used to test the key hypothesis. The authors find support for the idea that membership in voluntary associations facilitates a more sophisticated policy accountability among citizens.

Keywords: *social capital; accountability; presidential approval*

Citizens in a democracy must be able to hold their governments accountable. Individually it is a tall task for citizens, who do not normally pay close attention to politics, to gather accurate information about existing social conditions and policy programs and make political judgments in accord with this information. For citizens to hold leaders accountable for material conditions (e.g., Fiorina 1981; Key 1966) or public policies, they must be aware of those conditions or policies. The demands on citizens to perform this duty are far from simple. Indeed, one of the central claims of *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960, especially chap. 8) is that most citizens fall woefully short of being able to hold leaders accountable for government policies.

Citizens, however, need not navigate the political environment alone. While citizens are habitually inattentive to politics, the civically involved may inadvertently use voluntary associations as a source of information for evaluating government. We examine the influence of voluntary associations on *policy accountability*, in particular. By policy accountability, we mean the capacity of citizens to hold government accountable for the policy programs government undertakes. Policy accountability serves as a more direct and more sophisticated accountability mechanism than many scholars (or politicians) presume citizens engage in.

Much has been made of the need for high levels of social capital and an active civil society in a

functioning democracy. Social capital refers to the norms, obligations, and information that develop within a network of citizens, allowing them to pursue common goals more effectively (Coleman 1988). The majority of studies examining social capital have focused on the relationship between groups and interpersonal trust as a source and a resource of social capital to foster collective action via norms and obligations (e.g., Putnam 1995). We examine the role of voluntary associations as purveyors of incidental political information about government action and public policy—the third face of social capital—which citizens can use to form assessments of the president.

Social relationships reduce the cost, in terms of time and energy, of gathering information (Coleman 1988). Rather than scouring all information sources to keep abreast of events, individuals can glean information as a result of social interactions within voluntary associations. Indeed, scholars have long recognized the role of politically attentive citizens in transmitting political information to the rest of us (Downs 1957; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995; Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955). Voluntary associations provide a forum for such information transmission. Our study finds that voluntary associations generally enhance

Authors' Note: The order of authorship was determined by a game of Rochambeau. We thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful suggestions. Winifred Claibourn has accepted responsibility for all remaining errors.

the use of policy information, thereby improving the ability of citizens to hold governments accountable and increasing the incentive of government leaders to be responsive to citizen preferences. Thus, the information relayed within voluntary associations may provide a mechanism for increasing government responsiveness.

Social Capital and Governance

Putnam's (1993) work on Italian regional governments demonstrated a strong relationship between the existence of social capital and the responsiveness of government. In Putnam's theory, the density of certain types of networks facilitate collective action and provide for better governance because citizens are able to work together to demand more from government. Consequently, in these areas with denser networks of social ties, the regional governments were better able to address the needs of the citizens. This reciprocal process both improves governance and nurtures democracy and development (Putnam 1993, 1995, 2000).

While Putnam's theory of social capital operates at the aggregate level—areas with denser networks foster interpersonal trust, which stimulates the capacity of citizens to work together—Brehm and Rahn (1997) were among the first to consider some individual-level properties related to social capital. One important difference between these approaches is that Putnam's theory focuses on government performance, while the work of Brehm and Rahn focuses on attitudes toward government, independent of performance. They defined social capital at the individual level as the "reciprocal relationship between civic participation and interpersonal trust" (p. 1000; see also Claibourn and Martin 2000). They further connected each of these elements to confidence in government, arguing that greater interpersonal trust promotes confidence in government while civic engagement decreases it. Indeed, they found that membership in voluntary associations decreases confidence in government and argued, as did Tocqueville, that voluntary associations provide a layer of civil society in opposition to government power.¹

Like Brehm and Rahn, we consider individual-level properties of social capital; however, our focus on information takes us in a different direction altogether. The main thrust of our argument focuses not on the direct effect of joining groups on attitudes toward government, but on whether those who join groups bring more information to bear, information

gleaned from the groups, on their evaluations of government.

Coleman's original work on social capital pointed to three key by-products of social interaction—norms, obligations, and information. Our emphasis is on the third by-product. We contend that voluntary associations may serve, in part, as a surveillance mechanism, helping citizens to better monitor what government is doing.

Thus, we address the relationship between social capital and governance through the lens of accountability. In addition to improved collective action, we contend that voluntary association may aid democratic governance through improved information available to citizens. Only when citizens connect actual policy with their support for government can they hold leaders accountable for these actions. If government policy responds to citizen preferences as a function of improved collective action but people do not recognize this improvement, then they are unable to reward government leaders. Likewise, if government policy moves in a direction they dislike and they fail to recognize this movement, then they are unable to punish leaders.

Social Capital and Accountability

We begin with the expectation that membership in voluntary associations should influence attitudes toward government, though indirectly. At the individual level, involvement in voluntary associations should influence attitudes toward government as a result of the incidental information conveyed via others in the network.

The general idea of the absorption of incidental political information is informed by research in the social interaction tradition (see especially Berelson, Lazarsfeld, and McPhee 1954; Huckfeldt and Sprague 1995). It has an equally strong basis in Down's (1957) idea of rational ignorance. Citizens have a rational interest in acquiring political information "on the cheap" through communication and interaction with others rather than through their own isolated efforts (Huckfeldt 2001, 426; Downs 1957). In the 1990 American Citizen Participation Study (ACPS), respondents who stated that they were members of various voluntary associations were asked if people informally chatted about politics in the group (Verba et al. 1995). We present the resulting marginal frequencies in Table 1. These results demonstrate that individuals belonging to groups that

Table 1
Political Discussion within
Voluntary Associations

	Informally Chat about Politics in Group? ^a
Nonpolitical groups	
Veterans group	84
Professional organization	82
Ethnic organization	82
Service club	75
Neighborhood association	74
Senior citizen group	71
Education service organization	69
Literary group	67
Religious organization	63
Health service organization	57
Sport club	55
Cultural organization	55
Youth group	40
Political groups	
Liberal/conservative organization	100
Election organization	98
Political issue organization	97
Nonpartisan organization	91
Women's rights organization	89
Labor union	85

Source: American Citizen Participation Study, 1990 (Verba et al. 1995).

a. Percentage answering yes to the question, "Do people at these meetings sometimes chat informally about politics or government?"

were not explicitly political were very likely to report that informal political discussions occur in the group. At the high end, 84 percent of veterans group members say that informal political discussions occur within the group setting. At the low end, 40 percent of youth group members say informal political discussions occur. For all types of groups, other than youth groups, well over half of respondents reported the presence of informal political talk. We take this to be strong evidence that the incidence of political discussion is high enough to transmit potentially useful information to members.

In addition, members of voluntary associations possess significantly more political information than do nonmembers. The ACPS also gauged political knowledge.² Those involved in no voluntary associations answered on average 2.9 out of 10 knowledge questions correctly, whereas the moderately involved (those who belong to one to two groups) answered on average 4.1 questions correctly, and the highly involved (three or more groups) averaged 5.6 correct answers to political information questions.³

We do not contend that this demonstrates that people obtained this knowledge as a result of their memberships in associations, but rather that people who belong to associations seem relatively better informed about politics than do nonmembers, and those who belong to more associations possess more political knowledge still. When members of a group chat informally about politics and current affairs they are likely to pass along quality information. Hence, participation in voluntary associations increases the likelihood of exposure to others with relevant political information.

The case for voluntary associations strengthening policy accountability is further bolstered by previous research demonstrating that not only do people in discussion networks exchange political information but people differentiate others by political expertise and seek out those they see as having more accurate political information (Huckfeldt 2001). Rather than simply exchanging information, if less informed people seek those with greater expertise, voluntary associations may incidentally serve as civics classrooms.

The nature of discussion in voluntary associations, with a greater likelihood of group discussions over one-on-one conversation, may also improve the quality of information conveyed. As John Stuart Mill (1859/1956, 21) argued long ago, deliberation offers the potential for stronger arguments and evidence to trump weaker ones. Group discussions also offer the opportunity to pool informational resources and refine ideas that may allow each discussion member to take away more than they contributed.

Thus, information derived from associational memberships may influence attitudes toward government by amplifying the effect of policy on assessments of the president. If groups help transmit information, then individuals belonging to more groups would be more likely to know when government is producing policy with which they would agree and to evaluate the president accordingly.

Design and Methods

Our primary hypothesis of interest is whether membership in voluntary associations enhances the use of policy information in citizens' evaluations of the president in ways consistent with their ideological preferences. In other words, when presidential policy shifts in a conservative direction, does membership in civic associations help conservatives evaluate the president more positively and help liberals evaluate the president more negatively?

Our test of this hypothesis is necessarily indirect. While we have no way of verifying the content of information within groups, or what information transmitted in groups is retained by individuals, we can consider the empirical implications of receiving relevant policy information across groups (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994). If individuals are exposed to more policy information via group memberships, they should exhibit a *stronger* relationship between presidential policy output and presidential support, even after controlling for the kinds of resources that are likely to lead to greater individual information. Greater use of relevant policy information by the civically involved, then, is not just a function of individual resources, but ostensibly of information acquired as a result of civic interaction. If, instead, participation in groups does not provide a mechanism for obtaining political information, then the more involved citizens should evaluate the president on the basis of the same criteria—using the same information—as the less involved, once individual resources are held constant.

To test our hypothesis, we require individual-level measures of group memberships and assessments of support for the president, along with objective measures of presidential policy behavior over time. We begin with the General Social Survey (GSS) for the thirteen years in which both group involvement and presidential assessment questions were asked (Davis and Smith 1998).⁴ We supplement the survey data with contextual information on presidential policy output as measured by Stimson, MacKuen, and Erikson (1995). This annual measure is an index of how liberal the president's policy decisions were, based primarily on the mean Americans for Democratic Action (ADA) ratings of those members of Congress supporting and opposing the president in both parties and in both houses.⁵

To evaluate our hypothesis that membership in voluntary associations alters the importance of policy output on support for the president, we develop a series of ordered probit models using confidence in the executive as the dependent variable.⁶ We use confidence in the executive in lieu of the more commonly reported presidential approval measure solely because that is what is available in the GSS time series, one of the few data sources that consistently includes measures of involvement in voluntary associations over a relatively long time period. We look at the president rather than government more broadly because, as the only nationally elected official, the president is widely perceived within the mass public as being the focus of government.⁷

While the informational component of social capital is presumably fostered in interactions other than group memberships, a count of membership in voluntary associations has become a favorite measure of this component of social capital by virtue of its observability.⁸ We follow a similar strategy. We created a set of dummy variables for level of group involvement, the first indicating membership in one or two types of associations (the moderately involved) and the second denoting membership in three or more associations (the highly involved).⁹ This approach allows for the possibility of a nonlinear relationship between the number of types of associations a person belongs to and the information used in presidential evaluations. Thirty percent of our sample belonged to no groups, just under 55 percent belonged to one or two types, and 16 percent belonged to three or more groups.¹⁰

We estimate a series of models in which we interact the group membership dummies and presidential policy outcomes to test whether the influence of these outcomes on presidential evaluation are augmented by group memberships and whether this effect is monotonically increasing. In addition to group membership, we control for a variety of individual-level resources that account for variability in political knowledge—age, years of education, income in constant 1984 dollars, gender, and race of respondent¹¹—as well as partisanship.¹² Furthermore, we split our data by respondent ideology (liberals, conservatives, and moderates), as we expect individuals to respond differently depending on their level of agreement with the president's policies.

The ordered probit model is appropriate since the dependent variable, confidence in the executive, is discrete and ordinal, measured from 0 (low) to 2 (high). The model for policy accountability, estimated separately for liberals, conservatives, and moderates, is

$$y_i^* = \beta_0 + \beta_1 x_{1t} + \beta_2 x_{2i} + \beta_3 x_{3i} + \beta_4 (x_{1t} \times x_{2i}) + \beta_5 (x_{1t} \times x_{3i}) + X\beta + \epsilon_i,$$

where y_i^* is the latent variable representing the respondent's confidence in the executive, x_{1t} is presidential policy liberalism in year t centered around a mean of zero, x_{2i} is the dichotomous indicator of respondent membership in one or two groups, x_{3i} is the dichotomous indicator of respondent membership in three or more groups, and $X\beta$ represents the matrix of remaining control variables and their respective coefficients. Our primary hypothesis is tested in the effect of the interaction of memberships in voluntary associations with policy information on confidence in the executive (that is, by β_4 and β_5).

Table 2
Influence of Group Memberships on Policy Accountability

	Liberals	Moderates	Conservatives
Presidential policy liberalism	.004 (.006)	.001 (.007)	-.001 (.007)
One-Two Groups × Policy Liberalism	.002 (.003)	.002 (.002)	-.007* (.001)
Three-Plus Groups × Policy Liberalism	.007* (.003)	-.001 (.002)	-.002 (.002)
One-two groups	.066 (.050)	.123* (.042)	.135* (.023)
Three-plus groups	.162* (.049)	.169* (.033)	.178* (.033)
Party of president	.105* (.013)	.088* (.009)	.105* (.010)
Age	.001 (.001)	.001 (.001)	.002 (.002)
Education	-.071* (.019)	.022 (.015)	.057* (.020)
Income	-.000 (.000)	-.000 (.000)	-.001* (.000)
Female	.079* (.040)	.056 (.037)	-.036 (.039)
White	-.013 (.058)	.006 (.050)	.106 (.064)
T_1	-.420 (.099)	-.465 (.073)	-.450 (.092)
T_2	1.128 (.092)	1.183 (.081)	1.107 (.087)
N	3,563	5,057	4,183
Initial log-likelihood	-3,515.66	-4,872.46	-4,190.63
Final log-likelihood	-3,406.99	-4,796.39	-4,069.94
χ^2	217.34*	152.15*	241.38*

Source: General Social Survey (Davis and Smith 1998).

Note: Entries are ordered probit coefficients; clustered standard errors appear in parentheses.

* $p < .05$.

Ideally, we would be able to estimate the model as fully multilevel, with individual respondents nested within years, characterized by a common presidential policy environment. With only ten years (level-2 units), however, we do not have a large enough sample size to provide meaningful hypothesis tests for our key interactions within the likelihood framework. Nonetheless, we recognize that the potential clustering within years, due to a shared policy context, means the standard errors for the coefficients on our contextual variables may be underestimated. Thus, we use clustered-heteroskedasticity-consistent standard errors in the analyses that follow.

Results

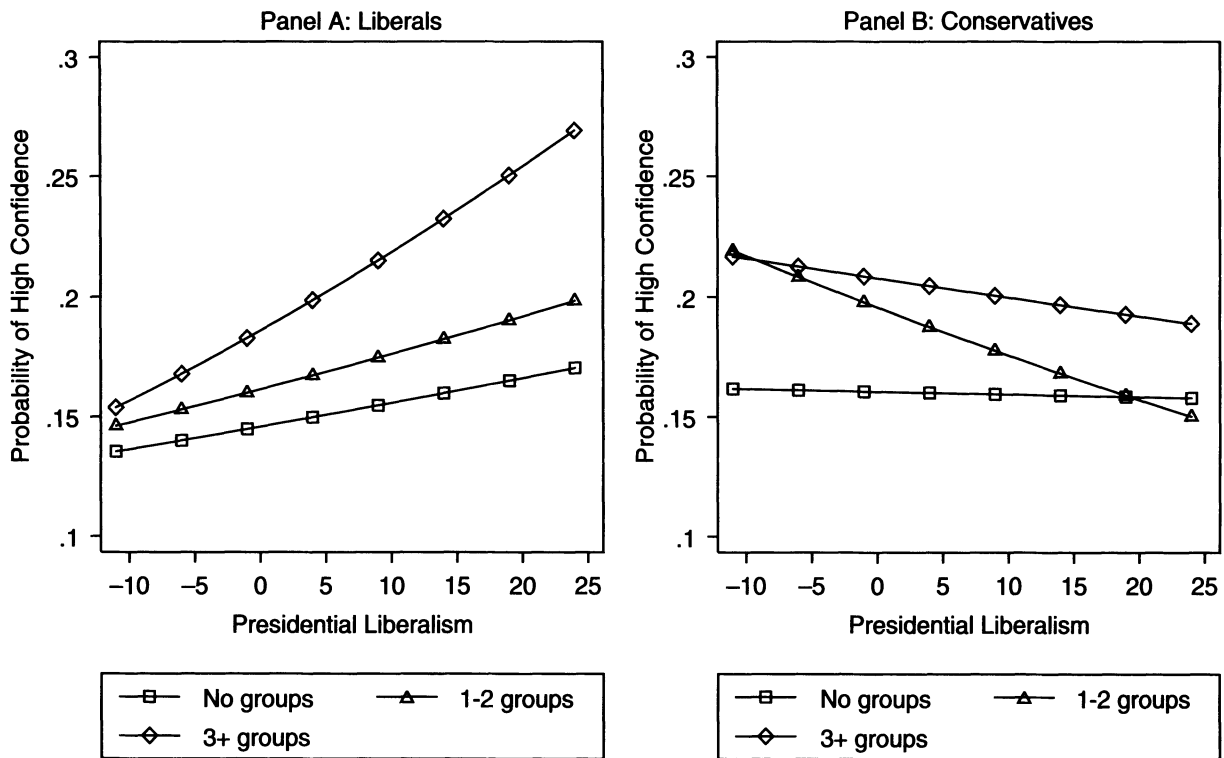
Policy accountability implies that increases in policy liberalism should be met with increasing confidence

by liberals and decreasing confidence by conservatives. If groups aid policy accountability, then we would expect the interactions of groups and policy liberalism to be in the same direction as policy liberalism alone. Our inclusion of multiple dichotomous group membership indicators interacted with policy output allow for the possibility of capturing multiple patterns. Policy accountability may be enhanced by joining only one or two groups with no further benefit from greater involvement; policy accountability may be boosted only among the most highly involved, those belonging to three or more associations; or policy accountability may steadily build as civic involvement increases.

We present the results of the analysis in table 2. The estimates for liberals, moderates, and conservatives are presented separately.

To begin, the first row provides the effect of presidential policy liberalism on confidence in the executive

Figure 1
Response to Presidential Liberalism, by Ideology and Group Memberships



Source: General Social Survey (Davis and Smith 1998), Estimated from Table 2.

among individuals who belong to no groups. Among these civically uninvolved respondents, we find no responsiveness to presidential policy behavior when forming assessments of the executive. Uninvolved liberals, moderates, and conservatives evidence no statistically significant relationship, though the signs of the coefficients among liberals and conservatives are as expected, respectively positive and negative.

Moving to the second and third rows of Table 2, we see the additive impact of civic involvement on policy accountability. Liberals involved in one or two groups respond to policy liberalism no differently than do the uninvolved liberals. However, the highly involved liberals (those in three or more groups) weight the president's policy liberalism considerably more heavily than do the uninvolved. Moderates belonging to voluntary associations do not behave significantly differently from the uninvolved in terms of policy accountability. Conservatives who are members of one or two groups, however, evidence a significantly stronger relationship between presidential policy behavior and confidence in the executive compared with the uninvolved conservatives. The coefficient on the interaction between three or more groups and policy liberalism,

however, is not statistically significantly different from that for the uninvolved.

Figure 1 depicts visually the results from Table 2 by providing the changes in the predicted probability of professing high confidence in the executive across changes in presidential liberalism. The figure includes a separate panel for liberals and conservatives, mirroring our analysis (we omit moderates from the figure as Table 2 showed no effects for these respondents). The horizontal axis of each panel represents presidential liberalism as it ranges from its minimum to its maximum value. The vertical axis represents the predicted probability of expressing high confidence in the president. Within each panel, there are three lines, one for individuals belonging to no groups, one for individuals who belong to one or two associations, and one for the most highly involved, those belonging to three or more groups.¹³

This reiterates the results of the previous table visually but better highlights when civic involvement is most likely to matter. Liberals, in general, respond positively to increasing presidential liberalism, as evidenced by Panel A. Regardless of group involvement, the probability of evaluating the executive positively

increases with presidential liberalism. For the most highly involved, however, this relationship is clearly stronger. When presidential actions are most conservative, little difference exists among liberals of varying levels of involvement in how they evaluate the president. In contrast, when presidential activity is most liberal, highly involved liberals are more responsive, with a .27 probability of giving the executive the highest evaluation compared to a .17 probability of rating the president highly among the uninvolved.

Panel B, representing conservatives, reveals a slightly different pattern. Individuals involved in at least one association exhibit a clear negative relationship, such that evaluations of the executive decline as presidential action becomes more liberal. The civically uninvolved, however, seem utterly unresponsive to presidential action; the highly involved conservatives, while generally more confident, are not really any more responsive. Like liberals, however, when presidential action is contrary to their ideology, conservatives possess similarly low evaluations of the president, regardless of group involvement. When presidential action is consistent with their ideology, however, civically involved conservatives are more responsive to presidential action when evaluating the president. In short, group involvement appears most useful in rewarding presidents for actions that are consistent with an individual's ideology. When presidential actions are most contrary to one's preferences, individuals seem to come to similar evaluations regardless of group involvement.

To summarize, the results consistently point to the informational component of social capital. Liberals, moderates, and conservatives who belong to no groups did not systematically rely on presidential liberalism when evaluating the executive. While the effects materialize at slightly different thresholds, among the ideologically inclined involvement in groups enhances policy accountability.

Discussion

The above results are consistent with the theoretical expectation that groups facilitate the transmission of political information. However, these results do not rule out a plausible rival interpretation that more knowledgeable people simply join more groups, so that increased policy accountability is really a function of greater information inherent to the types of individuals who join groups rather than to information gained *through* groups. Some types of groups, like political issue organizations, do of course draw

members from a more politically aware segment of the population, which is why we excluded political groups and unions from our measures of group memberships. Indeed, scholars of social capital should be more interested in memberships such as bird-watching societies than in the Democratic Party—as Putnam (1993, 90) put it, “These effects, it is worth noting, do not require that the manifest purpose of the association be political.” Other voluntary associations that people might participate in, such as hobby or religious groups, do not seem likely to draw disproportionately on the more politically attentive.

Nonetheless, to address this alternative explanation, we reanalyzed our data to incorporate the potentially moderating effect of political awareness, again, using education as a proxy, on the use of policy liberalism in presidential evaluation.¹⁴ If the alternative explanation—that more knowledgeable people are simply joining more groups, but groups themselves do not enhance information—then the interaction between years of formal education and presidential policy liberalism should be significant, and the interaction between group memberships and policy liberalism should fall below the threshold of statistical significance. On the other hand, if the groups-policy interaction remains statistically significant while controlling for the impact of political awareness on policy accountability, then something about the actual group involvement—which we presume to be information—serves to enhance policy accountability.

Table 3 presents the results of this additional test. The same basic patterns found in Table 2 are reiterated in this analysis: for liberals, the highly involved do differ from the uninvolved in the weight they give to policy outcomes; political moderates exhibit no obvious responsiveness to policy output; and among conservatives, once again only the moderately involved systematically link presidential action to presidential attitudes.

In addition, across each ideological category, the interaction between education and policy liberalism is not statistically discernible from zero. While education is not a perfect proxy for the possession of political information, it is quite strongly related. If the rival hypothesis—that individuals with more political knowledge, and thus more ability to weight presidential policy in their presidential evaluations, are joining more groups—is accounting for our results, we should expect education to pick up at least some of this potential effect. In short, these results mirror our earlier findings and cast doubt on the rival causal hypothesis.

Table 3
Influence of Group Memberships and Education on Policy Accountability

	Liberals	Moderates	Conservatives
Presidential policy liberalism	.004 (.006)	-.000 (.007)	-.001 (.007)
One-Two Groups × Policy Liberalism	.002 (.003)	.003 (.002)	-.006* (.001)
Three-Plus Groups × Policy Liberalism	.008* (.004)	-.001 (.001)	-.000 (.001)
Education × Policy Liberalism	-.000 (.001)	-.000 (.001)	-.002 (.001)
One-two groups	.065 (.050)	.123* (.037)	.135* (.023)
Three-plus groups	.161* (.049)	.169* (.034)	.176* (.031)
Party of president	.106* (.013)	.088* (.008)	.102* (.010)
Education	-.070* (.020)	.022 (.015)	.060* (.021)
Age	.001 (.001)	.001 (.001)	.002 (.002)
Income	-.000 (.000)	-.000 (.000)	-.001* (.000)
Female	.079* (.039)	.056 (.036)	-.037 (.039)
White	-.013 (.057)	.007 (.049)	.107 (.064)
T_1	-.420 (.100)	-.465 (.071)	-.446 (.091)
T_2	1.128 (.092)	1.183 (.080)	1.111 (.086)
N	3,563	5,057	4,183
Initial log-likelihood	-3,515.66	-4,872.46	-4,190.63
Final log-likelihood	-3,406.92	-4,796.37	-4,068.70
χ^2	217.49*	152.18*	243.85*

Source: General Social Survey (Davis and Smith 1998).

Note: Entries are ordered probit coefficients; clustered standard errors appear in parentheses.

* $p < .05$.

Even so, it is appropriate to encourage readers to see both the advantages and limitations of our analysis. Some may find our evidence unpersuasive because it cannot definitively rule out the rival plausible hypothesis that the more knowledgeable seek out more groups. The secondary tests presented in Table 3 should help discount this concern. The tests presented in our analysis offer the toughest test possible, given the lack of long-term panel studies in social capital. We are fortunate that the GSS carried measures of voluntary associations for the many years that it did, and despite its limitations, we must also recognize that it stands as a unique resource. We hope that future studies will improve upon our empirical analysis, but to do so, current scholars will need to lay the foundation by investing in panel studies that may take years to harvest.

Conclusion

Participation in voluntary associations, consistent with a theory of social capital, seems to enhance the ability of some citizens to hold the executive accountable for policy outputs. This finding bears on three important discussions within political science.

One of the conclusions of *The American Voter* (Campbell et al. 1960) is that policy accountability on the part of citizens is nearly impossible. The authors concluded that the public "is almost completely unable to judge the rationality of government action; knowing little of particular policies and what has led to them, the mass electorate is not able to appraise either its goals or the appropriateness of the means chosen to serve these goals" (p. 543). In response,

research on accountability began emphasizing outcomes, epitomized by Key's (1966) famous dictum that voters are not fools and could at least hold leaders responsible for material conditions (see also Fiorina 1981). This work reassured students of democratic theory by reducing the complexity of the task required of citizens in order to enact some version of democratic accountability. This accountability based on outcomes requires of citizens only that they are aware of who is in office and are cognizant of social conditions such as the existence of international crisis or the status of the domestic economy.

The problem with material accountability alone, however, is that it overstates the relationship between political actions and social outcomes. Leaders are rewarded (or punished) for outcomes over which they, at best, have only partial control. Furthermore, policy decisions ultimately may have a greater impact on the *distribution* of resources than on more blunt aggregate outcomes, like unemployment. Policy accountability requires more of citizens—that they are aware of the actions of leaders and how these actions connect to individual political preferences, irrespective of collective outcomes. Government responsiveness is enhanced when leaders are held responsible for both social outcomes and their policy behaviors. Our research suggests that citizens may be more capable of this more complex task than previously appreciated.

The capacity of citizens to engage in policy accountability arises out of the social context of politics. That is, citizens possess the ability to hold leaders accountable for policy because they are not isolated political actors. Following on the research of the Columbia School (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955) and more recently Huckfeldt and Sprague (1995), our results lend support to the growing consensus that social interaction shapes political behavior. Indeed, we strongly echo Huckfeldt's (2001, 437) warning: "A scholarly treatment of citizenship that focuses solely on isolated individuals ignores the collective potential of democratic politics; and it underestimates the capacity of citizens who are located in complex networks of political interdependence."

Finally, our results push the social capital debate within political science in a new direction. In its earlier incarnation, the resource referred to as social capital contained three components—norms, reciprocity, and information (Coleman 1988). While political science has fruitfully examined the first two (Putnam 1993, 1995), we focus on the importance of interpersonal associations on the information matrix that people use to judge government. Indeed, the informational

carrying capacity of voluntary associations may provide a vital link between greater social capital and more responsive government by facilitating citizen evaluation of government actions.

Notes

1. While each of these connections—between trust and participation, trust and confidence in government, and participation and confidence in government—is modeled as being reciprocal, the relationship between participation and confidence in government is found to be unidirectional (Brehm and Rahn 1997).

2. The scale of political knowledge was created with a battery of ten questions tapping current political affairs information as well as information on democratic principles.

3. These differences are statistically significant, $F = 394$, $df = 2, 2,514$, $p < .000$.

4. The years include 1975, 1978, 1980, 1983, 1984, 1986-1991, 1993, and 1994.

5. The presidential liberalism scores are empirical estimates of the latent policy behavior, constructed from a dynamic model of the relation between government policy and public opinion. Multiple measures of presidential policy were incorporated, including the liberalism of presidential supporters in Congress, the percentage of presidential policy stands on legislation that were liberal, and the percentage of presidential positions on judicial issues that were liberal. The presidential liberalism scores in this time period range from 21.58 to 57.32 with a mean of 33 and a standard deviation of 12.2. Higher values represent more liberal positions. Policy output data was available only up to 1990. Consequently, the following analysis includes the period from 1975 to 1990 only.

6. The question reads, "I am going to name some institutions in this country. As far as the people running these institutions are concerned, would you say you have a great deal of confidence, only some confidence, or hardly any confidence at all in them? The Executive branch of the federal government?"

7. Unquestionably, presidential approval would be preferable, both because in singling out the president for evaluation the measure has face validity and because this is the measure that members of the press and the government attend to more closely. Nonetheless, we justify the use of confidence in the executive on multiple grounds. Confidence in the executive arguably contains an element of immediate presidential approval as well as diffuse support. Indeed, even more generic measures such as trust in government track the incumbent administration quite closely (Citrin 1974), and approval of the president is one of the strongest predictors of trust in government (Citrin and Green 1986). Consequently, the primary object of these general attitudes toward government is the president. Confidence in the executive, because it explicitly mentions the branch of government headed by the president, should be even more identified with the president than trust in government. Furthermore, partisanship and ideology are consistently two of the strongest antecedents of both presidential approval and confidence in the executive. Finally, to the degree this measure is contaminated with more general system support, this should serve to weaken our results, as such diffuse support is less likely to respond to contemporary policy output.

8. With regard to the relation between social capital and improved governance, the prevalence of voluntary associations and citizen involvement as an indicator of social capital is perhaps not

as slippery as it might first appear, since it is such groups that are instrumental in extracting government resources.

9. The question asks, "Now we would like to know something about the groups or organizations to which individuals belong. Here is a list of various organizations. Could you tell me whether or not you are a member of each type?" We include the following associations: fraternal groups, service clubs, veterans groups, sports groups, youth groups, school service groups, hobby or garden clubs, school fraternities or sororities, nationality groups, farm organizations, literary, art, discussion or study groups, professional or academic societies, and church-affiliated groups. We exclude political clubs and labor unions from our measure in order to more cleanly capture involvement in the *civic* associations so admired by social capitalists.

10. Because our theory emphasizes interaction as a source of information acquisition, we want to ensure that we are capturing group involvement rather than merely "checkbook" membership. We cross-validated our measure of group involvement by comparing the General Social Survey (GSS) measures to similar measures in the 1990 Citizen Participation Study (CPS) and found that of the nonpolitical groups that we track, 67 percent of people claiming to be a member had attended a meeting in the past year, indicating some slippage, but suggesting that most of the time folks who claim membership are not just "checkbook" members. Moreover, respondents in the CPS appear to interpret questions about "membership" as requiring more than a financial contribution. For four of the ten groups used in both the CPS and GSS studies, a higher number of respondents report giving money to these groups than claim membership in the group.

11. Ideally, we would be able to control directly for the possession of political information, or behaviors likely to result in political information such as media attention. Unfortunately, such measures are not consistently available in the GSS data over this time period. Thus, following Zaller, we use education as a proxy for political knowledge (Zaller and Hunt 1995; Zaller 1986) along with characteristics known to be correlated with political knowledge. It is essential that we have variation in policy liberalism, which we can only get over time. It is equally essential that we have a consistent measure of group involvement. Despite its limitations, then, the GSS data is the best available to date.

12. The 7-point measure of partisanship is coded so that it is positive if an individual's party identification matches the party of the president currently in office and negative otherwise.

13. The remaining control variables are held constant at their means or modes.

14. The previous model controlled for education and demonstrated that if two individuals possess equal education but one is civically uninvolved while the other is highly involved, the second individual would incorporate information on policy outcomes more heavily into her presidential evaluation. Here, we consider the possibility that individuals with different levels of education or knowledge weight policy outcomes differently, controlling for civic involvement.

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