SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POLITICS

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ABSTRACT

This review evaluates the most recent studies of social capital in political science and argues that they have strayed considerably from the original treatment of social capital, which casts it as endogenous. Recent treatments have recast social capital as a feature of political culture and thereby treat values as exogenous. These two approaches emanate from incompatible premises and have fundamentally different implications. Thus, efforts to combine the two approaches are rendered unproductive by inevitable inconsistencies of internal logic. Moreover, empirical tests of the exogenous social capital approach are deficient: They are selective in their use of data and employ ad hoc procedures at crucial junctures. We therefore urge a return to the treatment of social capital as endogenous.

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[Many] writers, disposed to compromise, evidently believe that false concepts can be made into perfectly sensible ones simply by taking little bits of each and gluing them together into a “between-the-two” or “as-well-as” joinery of totally opposed notions.

Samuelsson 1961, p. 25

Why have the newly industrializing economies of East Asia flourished? How are the persisting disparities between northern and southern Italy best ex-
plained? Have Americans lost confidence in the competence of the federal government? Does effective government require a citizenry of joiners?

These big questions continue to attract much attention. A variety of different explanations of these phenomena have been put forward, but in recent years those couched in terms of social capital, community norms, or values have received special notice (see e.g. Putnam 1993, 1995a,b,c; Fukuyama 1995; Inglehart 1990, 1997; Harrison 1985, 1992, 1997). Indeed, these explanations have struck a responsive chord and have received an extraordinary amount of attention from scholars, social and political commentators, and the broader policy community. Thus, Senator Bill Bradley, in a February 9, 1995, speech to the National Press Club, remarked, “Today the fragile ecology of our social environment is as threatened as that of our natural environment. Like fish floating on the surface of a polluted river, the network of voluntary associations in America seems to be dying.” [A variation on this theme is the even broader and more apocalyptic suggestion that post–Cold War global politics is being reconfigured around cultural groupings, so that future wars will occur between states and groups from different “civilizations” (e.g. Barber 1995, Huntington 1996), but such claims are beyond the scope of this review.] The impact of these explanations reaches well beyond the academy.

Our purpose is to evaluate the burgeoning set of studies that have advanced these explanations. We argue that these analyses are less useful than they might at first appear. Indeed, they depart from the more coherent accounts of social capital and return us to cultural explanations that were in vogue a generation or two ago. We begin by outlining the arguments that have attracted recent attention and then turn to an evaluation.

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

The idea of social capital was developed most clearly by the late James S. Coleman (1988, 1990) as part of his effort to develop a general, coherent theory of social relations. He used the term in conjunction with the concepts of physical and human capital, drawing explicit distinctions among them. Physical capital, of course, refers to investment in tools, machinery, and other tangible productive equipment, while human capital refers to those less tangible investments in the skill and knowledge of individuals (see e.g. Schultz 1961, Becker 1975). Social capital is even less palpable because it stems from changes in the relations among individuals that facilitate action. Coleman argued that it assumes three forms:

- obligations and expectations, which depend on trustworthiness of the social environment, information-flow capability of the social structure, and norms
accompanied by sanctions. A property shared by most forms of social capital that differentiates it from other forms of capital is its public goods aspect: the actor or actors who generate social capital ordinarily capture only a small part of its benefits, a fact that leads to underinvestment in social capital. (Coleman 1988, p. S119)

More recent analysts have drawn on Coleman to emphasize the centrality of two factors to social capital: trust and social networks. Putnam adopts the following definition: “By ‘social capital,’ I mean features of social life—networks, norms, and trust—that enable participants to act together more effectively to pursue shared interests” (1995c, pp. 664–65). Indeed, Putnam emphasizes that his use of the term social capital deviates only “slightly” from Coleman’s. Fukuyama describes social capital as “a capability that arises from the prevalence of trust in a society or certain parts of it. It can be embodied in the smallest and most basic social group, the family, as well as the largest of all groups, the nation, and in all the other groups in between” (1995, p. 26). Echoing these themes, Inglehart invokes de Tocqueville and Putnam to interpret social capital as “a culture of trust and tolerance, in which extensive networks of voluntary associations emerge.” (Inglehart 1997, p. 188)

THE RECENT SOCIAL CAPITAL ARGUMENT

In perhaps the best-known analysis, Putnam asserts that social capital “improve[s] the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions” (1993, p. 167). To illustrate the spontaneous cooperation that stems from social capital, Putnam cites the rotating credit associations found in Japan and elsewhere, whose members contribute regularly to a fund, all of which is given to a single member on a rotating basis. These rotating credit associations “clearly violate the logic of collective action: Why shouldn’t a participant drop out once he has received the pot? Seeing that risk, why would anyone else contribute in the first place?” (1993, p. 168). The answer, according to Putnam, lies in the “underlying stock of social capital” (1993, p. 169): These associations would simply not be possible without high levels of trust. It is thus unsurprising that rotating credit associations are “often found in conjunction with cooperatives and other forms of mutual aid and solidarity” (Putnam 1993, p. 169).

Drawing on his broader evaluation of institutional performance across Italy’s 20 regions, Putnam comes to the more general but similar conclusion that the effectiveness of regional governments hinges on patterns of social networks (civic associations). The longstanding lack of a “civic culture” in many regions of Italy has doomed them to poverty and governmental incompetence.
In a more recent study, Putnam (1995a,b,c) adopts the same general framework to lament the political consequences of the decline of social capital in the United States over the last two decades, a decline that has gradually produced a society of go-it-alone bowlers, isolated both from each other and from broader currents of community political life.

A parallel argument is advanced in Fukuyama’s (1995) analysis of the role of trust in economic performance. Although such factors as technology, markets, and human capital contribute to economic growth, Fukuyama concludes that the key ingredient in generating growth is social capital in the form of a supporting culture of trust, or, as he terms it, “spontaneous sociability.” The same theme appears in Harrison’s (1985, 1992, 1997) conclusion that political and economic development depend on values involving trust, ethical codes, and orientations to work and risk-taking. Inglehart offers a minor variation on the motif with his assertion that trust and membership in voluntary associations are “strongly linked” with stable democracy and the shifts to democracy between 1990 and 1995 (1997, pp. 189–205). (Inglehart’s results, however, are mixed; many of the bivariate associations he reports are at best intermittently significant with other factors controlled.)

These are some of the more prominent recent claims for the powerful economic, social, and political consequences of social capital. Taken solely as a statement that social capital is important and worthy of investigation, they are innocuous and do little violence to Coleman’s original analysis. However, the recent studies go further, suggesting that social capital reflects enduring cultural norms that cannot be explained in terms of rational values. Further, these norms serve as the key exogenous factors in generating economic and governmental performance. Thus, according to Fukuyama, “social capital, which is practiced as a matter of a rational habit and has its origins in ‘irrational’ phenomena like religion and traditional ethics, would appear to be necessary to permit the proper functioning of rational modern economic and political institutions” (1995, p. 325). The principal limitation of these arguments stems from their attempt to repackage social capital as a cultural phenomenon.

Treating social capital as culture was certainly not the intent of the original social-capital theorists. Coleman (1988, 1990) and Granovetter (1973, 1985, 1992) explicitly embedded social capital in a rational-choice framework. Their analyses resemble recent institutional approaches to politics that seek to identify the conditions under which trust can be generated. The key feature of such studies, of course, is that they endogenize social capital.

Whether social capital is most profitably treated as endogenous or exogenous may seem a picayune question that can readily be resolved empirically. However, the issue highlights the fact that the two treatments stem from dis-
tinct and fundamentally incompatible theoretical orientations, making them awkward to amalgamate into a single argument. As many before us have recognized, no coherent theory can be achieved by selectively drawing on each and hoping that the resulting pastiche “works” (see e.g. Samuelsson 1961).

Further, the question is not of merely arcane interest. For example, considering trust endogenous encourages us to ask which arrangements provide incentives for trust. Considering trust exogenous, however, means that we take levels of trust as given and not subject to change in the short-to-medium term. Putnam concluded that differences in social capital across Italian regions have persisted for up to a millennium, a conclusion LaPalombara judged “dismal.” He observed, “Civic traditions not only have remarkable staying power: they are also almost impossible to change, even in the long run.... This will be small solace to southern Italians, just as it will, unfortunately, confirm the stereotype held by so many northern Italians that ‘Italy, from Rome south, is really part of Africa’” (LaPalombara 1993, p. 530). An Italian regional official came to the same judgment: “This is a counsel of despair! You’re telling me that nothing I can do will improve our prospects for success. The fate of reform was sealed centuries ago” (quoted in Putnam 1993, p. 183). The policy implications are self-evident.

In the following section we show how current treatments of social capital as exogenous grow out of earlier work on political culture. We next contrast this with the original approach that endogenizes social capital.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AS CIVIC CULTURE

As we have already emphasized, recent discussions have equated social capital with political culture. For example, Inglehart defines social capital as “a culture of trust and tolerance” (1997, p. 188). Thus, it is not surprising that many of these discussions draw explicitly on Weber (1905), Banfield (1958), and Almond & Verba (1963).

The intellectual godfather of work on political culture is Weber’s (1905) thesis linking Protestantism with capitalism. Weber sought to identify the peculiar characteristics of Protestantism that might account for the association he reported between the proportion of Protestants in various areas of Europe and the economic growth of those areas. Weber’s answer emphasized Protestantism’s challenge to medieval discipline, along with distinctive Protestant values that he believed fostered entrepreneurial skills.

Banfield’s influential analysis stemmed from a case study of “Montegranaro,” a small village in southern Italy. Echoing Weber, he argued that the “backwardness” of the Montegraniisi stemmed from the community’s persistent inability to organize. He described a population afflicted by chronically
high levels of “amoral familism” that impeded economic and political development. At the heart of this condition was a lack of interpersonal trust extending beyond the family. Banfield judged amoral familism to be the core of the problem because “it is a condition of successful organization that members have some trust in each other” (Banfield 1958, p. 87).

Almond & Verba (1963) cast their empirical net more broadly and conducted extensive survey research in Germany, Italy, Mexico, the United Kingdom, and the United States to identify social attributes conducive to democracy. One of their principal conclusions centered on interpersonal trust: Citizens of the United Kingdom and the United States—the nations with the longest histories of stable democracy—showed higher levels of interpersonal trust than those surveyed in Germany, Italy, and Mexico. Further, trust was correlated with political activism. These results, among others, were interpreted as showing that citizens of the United States and the United Kingdom were part of the “civic culture” necessary for effective democracy.

Recent discussions of social capital share much with these classic studies of political culture. First, they are fundamentally concerned with the prevalence of coherent value clusters within societies. Although the cultural pattern reflects primarily the attitudes of individuals, it assumes political and social significance because it is shared among individuals. At their heart, then, cultural arguments such as Weber’s and Banfield’s center on aggregate properties of societies.

Second, these cultural syndromes are durable. Even if slightly modified by short-term forces, their fundamental effects persist over the long haul, as described by Weber and more recent analysts. Harrison contends that “human development is frustrated in most Hispanic-American countries—and most Third World countries—by a way of seeing the world that impedes the achievement of political pluralism, social equity, and dynamic economic progress. And that way of the world has been driven, without significant deviation, by the momentum of centuries” (Harrison 1985, p. 168). Putnam (1993) traces the recent success of Italian regional governments to legacies of civic engagement reaching back as far as the Middle Ages. The point is also stressed in Inglehart’s claim that “people live in the past much more than they realize” (Inglehart 1990, p. 422). That is, the impact of experience on behavior is affected by norms passed across generations through early socialization (see also Verba 1965, p. 554; Moore 1966, p. 485). Culture thus conditions how people adapt to changes in institutional incentive structures, which distinguishes the cultural perspective from social choice arguments, as Inglehart and others have noted.

The third common feature of these enduring cultural syndromes is that their significance stems from their influence on other outcomes. The syndromes are treated as exogenous. Thus, Weber’s analysis continues to attract attention be-
cause of the effects on economic growth he attributed to Protestantism. Weber’s explicit goal was to undermine “economic determinism” by showing that values are not epiphenomenal, Marx to the contrary (Zeitlin 1990). Banfield (1958) was equally specific: Montegrano was backward because amoral familism was endemic.

The political-culture account thus identifies distinctive clusters of attitudes widely held among individuals. These clusters, which represent subjective worldviews that are highly resistant to change, are cast as the fundamental generator of economic and political performance. Subjective orientations are considered more crucial than objective conditions embodied in institutions, and they endure in the face of institutional change. Subjective orientations are critical in a second sense: People from distinct cultural groups process the same information differently, even when they face the same institutional constraints and incentives.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AS ENDOGENOUS

Let us now consider the alternative view, in which social capital is endogenized. In Coleman’s usage, “trust” is “simply an incorporation of risk into the decision of whether or not to engage in...action” (1990, p. 61). Decisions to trust are based on weighing the potential gain (broadly defined) if the trustee is trustworthy against the potential loss if the trustee is not. Cast this way, a decision to place trust entails merely the same rational considerations as a decision to place a bet (Coleman 1990, p. 99). And this calculus is not limited to blackjack: “The mistake a banker dreads, the mistake a lover dreads, the mistake a friend dreads is to place trust in someone who cannot be trusted” (Coleman 1990, p. 100). Note that Coleman cast trust in an expected-utility framework.

Further, trust is endogenized. Coleman illustrated the point with Wechsberg’s (1966) study of the behavior of buyers and sellers in London’s diamond district: “Men walk around Hatton Garden with a hundred thousand pounds worth of diamonds that were handed over to them in trust. In a dingy office a man shows another man a number of stones that cost him a fortune, and then goes away while the buyer inspects them carefully. No contracts are made. Nothing is written down. All deals are settled verbally” (Wechsberg 1966, p. 83). The high level of trust manifested here stems from the fact that “the reputation for trustworthiness is of central importance...because that reputation is quickly communicated among all those on whom the trustee depends for future business, that is, for future placement of trust” (Coleman 1990, p. 109). Thus, the structure of the situation (i.e. the large long-term costs associated with a short-term breach of trust) creates incentives for individuals to be trustworthy.
There are many other examples of this phenomenon. Popkin (1982) compared the levels of trust in Thailand’s rice and rubber markets, an especially instructive case because it involves entrepreneurs in a single country, which means that culture is effectively controlled for. Drawing on Akerlof’s (1970) analysis of the market for “lemons” (i.e. products of inferior quality), Popkin showed how the availability of information about the quality of a product affects the price the buyer is willing to pay.

In markets for rice, the reputation of the seller is inconsequential because the purchaser can monitor the quality of the product before the purchase; the seller cannot exaggerate its quality because “by rubbing a few grains of rice between two blocks of wood, a prospective buyer can determine moisture content and the size of the grain and get a rough estimate of broken grains” (Popkin 1982, p. 266). Rubber markets, on the other hand, are characterized by information asymmetry; only the seller knows the quality of the product at the time of sale. The buyer cannot evaluate the quality of the product until several months after the purchase, when the raw, unsmoked rubber has been processed. In rubber markets, therefore, the price sellers receive for their product hinges critically on their perceived trustworthiness.

Observe that trust is again cast as endogenous to the structure of the situation (here, the nature of the commodity), not as evidence of durable social norms absorbed by individuals. Thus, transitions from selling rice to selling rubber entail cultivating a reputation and therefore take longer than transitions in the opposite direction.

In some respects, the relationship between buyers and sellers represents an iterated Prisoner’s Dilemma in that each participant could reap a short-run gain by being untrustworthy but incur thereby a long-term loss (Axelrod 1984). A seller who has earned a reputation for conveying the fair market value of the rubber for sale could inflate the estimate at the buyer’s expense. However, to do so would cost the seller her reputation, a long-term cost because future buyers would only offer her the “lemon” price—i.e. the price for lowgrade rubber—regardless of true quality. When sellers and buyers know they will interact in the future, and the interaction is sufficiently valuable to each of them, an incentive to trust and to be trustworthy is created.

Take a case where trust is privatized. Gambetta (1993) analyzes the Sicilian mafia, a loose cartel of families that produces and sells private protection. Gambetta treats this product as a surrogate for the enforcement of property rights by the state, and hence as an imperfect substitute for mutual trust. Obviously, demand for such a service is highest when the state cannot or will not enforce contracts, which means that mafia protection typically involves illegal activities.
The case is of special interest because mafia activities have often been cast as the outcome of uniquely Sicilian values that assign little importance to trust (see Hess 1973, Schneider & Schneider 1994). However, the structure of private protection has also been shown to account for the rise of organized crime in Russia (Varese 1994), suggesting that mafia activities do not stem from a distinctively Sicilian subculture of distrust. Although state enforcement of property rights constitutes a public good, Gambetta (1993) shows that the distinctive feature of the mafia’s product is that the protection offered is private. Traders can therefore distinguish insiders (other traders with mafia protection) from outsiders (traders without it); cheating outsiders will not affect their reputation with insiders. In fact, both insiders and the mafia have incentives to cheat outsiders. Distrust is thus endogenized—a product, not a source, of the mafia.

Social capital is also endogenized when treated as a by-product of organizations. Coleman illustrated this process with the case of a group of parents whose children attend the same school. When this group forms a PTA chapter, it provides a public good and thereby generates social capital. An organization that provides a public good can benefit nonparticipants as well as participants. For example, a whole school will benefit from the high disciplinary standards promoted by an active PTA (Coleman 1990, p. 313). Here, group membership is cast quite differently from the way recent social-capital arguments would lead us to believe. Rather than emanating from a culture of trust, social capital is a public-good by-product of organizations. Individuals join these organizations in the expectation of securing benefits. As the organization continues to provide those benefits, it builds a reputation for being trustworthy, providing in the process a feedback mechanism that enhances trust.

This view of group membership is hardly new. In his classic study of organizations, Barnard (1938) noted that although cooperation can be “spectacular” more powerful than the unorganized efforts of multiple individuals, it does depend on individuals’ efforts, and “the contributions of personal efforts which constitute the energies of organizations are yielded by individuals because of incentives” (Barnard 1938, p. 139). Clark & Wilson similarly emphasized that “all viable organizations must provide tangible or intangible incentives to individuals in exchange for contributions of individual activity to the organizations” (1961–1962, p. 130). In other words, individuals join organizations in response to incentives, and social capital is generated by their ensuing membership. And, of course, the incentives are not limited to material benefits: “People are sometimes also motivated [to join] by a desire to win prestige, respect, friendship, and other social and psychological objectives” (Olson 1965, p. 60). [For a cogent and striking example of the incentives offered in noneconomic groups, see Iannaconne’s (1994; 1995a,b) analyses of membership in religious organizations.]
Finally, political institutions often play a key role in generating trust (e.g. Knight 1992). Consider societies that are ethnically divided. Ethnicity is a specially interesting case, because ethnic markers have so often been taken to reflect the boundaries of primordial groups that pose particular threats to states, the quintessential exogenously defined cultural groups (the classic statement is in Geertz 1963). The question then is why ethnic conflict is relatively uncommon, given the number of ethnically divided societies (Fearon & Laitin 1996).

Again, the issue is most fruitfully broached by endogenizing trust. As Weingast (1997, 1998) shows, a principal source of ethnic conflict in divided societies is fear of becoming a victim. Where no single ethnic group is dominant, all groups fear aggression from a rival group. When a group fearing victimization has the chance to employ the state against another, it has an incentive to mount a preemptive strike. Ethnic conflict thus occurs because it is preferable to be an aggressor than to be a victim and because promises by individual groups not to aggress do not themselves suffice to prevent the outbreak of conflict.

In such settings, it is crucial to construct political institutions that raise the costs of using the state for ethnic violence. Indeed, by altering each group’s incentives, effective institutions can make tolerance self-enforcing, thus credibly committing each group to honor its promises and thereby minimizing the odds that any group will be victimized. Increasing the costs of defection provides incentives for groups and their leaders to conclude that it is neither in their interest, nor in the interest of their rivals, to strike first. Trust and cooperation are thus seen not as exogenous but as created.

Observe the advantages of this perspective. An exogenous approach to ethnic trust incorrectly implies that violent ethnic conflict is endemic to all divided societies at all times. In contrast, the endogenous-trust perspective leads us more accurately to expect higher volumes of such conflict in some divided societies than in others. It also helps account more directly for the temporal ebbs and flows of ethnic conflict that accompany institutional collapse and re-generation within divided societies.

Treating trust as endogenous has a venerable history. In his *Discourses*, Machiavelli argued that where the government’s capacity to confiscate property is limited, citizens enjoy higher levels of wealth:

> People will gladly have children when they know that they can support them, and that they will not be deprived of their patrimony, and where they know that their children not only are born free and not slaves, but, if they possess talents and virtue, can arrive at the highest dignities of the state. In free countries we also see wealth increase more rapidly, both that which results from the culture of the soil and that which is produced by industry and art; for everybody gladly multiplies those things, and seeks to acquire those
goods the possession of which he can tranquilly enjoy. (Machiavelli 1940, p. 287)

Thus, in Machiavelli’s republic, the structure of political institutions determines levels of trust. Where individuals have secure property rights, they have an incentive to invest and work hard.

CAN THE TWO APPROACHES BE USEFULLY BLENDED?

We have outlined the two contending approaches to social capital. The first treats trust and related values as exogenous, where durable cultural norms drive political and economic performance. The second approach endogenizes social capital as an outcome of social and political arrangements. As we have noted, the two approaches have different policy implications. Thus, it is not surprising that efforts to integrate the two are most charitably described as logically infelicitous.

Consider Putnam’s (1993) well-known analysis of Italian regional governments in *Making Democracy Work*. He attributes the superior performance of northern regional governments and the lackluster performance of those in the south to cultural differences in civic engagement. These differences are cast as enduring, and indeed Putnam traces them back to the Middle Ages. The argument is, of course, consistent with the standard accounts of political culture (e.g. Banfield 1958, Almond & Verba 1963) on which it explicitly draws. In stark contrast, in his equally well-known “bowling alone” thesis, offered as an elaboration of the argument from the Italian case, “Civic America” is said to have evaporated in just two decades (Putnam 1995a,b,c)! Lemann goes to the heart of the matter:

> The talk about “Bowling Alone,” and to a lesser extent the article itself, directly contradict the logic of *Making Democracy Work*. In Putnam’s Italian model the kind of overnight deterioration of civic virtue that he proposes regarding America would be inconceivable—once civic virtue is in place it is incredibly durable over the centuries (Lemann 1996, p. 25).

Inglehart’s (1997) analyses contain a similar internal contradiction. On one hand, he treats social capital as stable. For example, he uses various measures of social capital measured in 1990 to account for economic growth from 1960 to 1989. He also uses slightly different measures of social capital, again measured in 1990, to account for the stability of democracy from 1920 to 1995. This is justified with the bold claim that national differences in value orientations are sufficiently stable that social capital measured in 1990 is an effective proxy for social capital measured in 1920.
Yet in the same volume he also advances his well-known argument that value orientations have undergone a systematic and pronounced shift over the past 25 years as new cohorts have replaced their predecessors. The proposition that core values are shifting with successive cohorts as societies become wealthier implies that those values are endogenous and responsive to changes in economic conditions. Thus, cultural values are only intermittently durable.

Remarkably, neither Putnam nor Inglehart provides any explanation for this inconsistency. Indeed, they seem largely unaware of it, proceeding with allusions both to the enduring nature of key social norms and to radical changes in a generation or two. This oscillation between durable and changing norms appears to be an ad hoc strategy to make social capital “fit” as a cultural variable. For some purposes, values are considered durable and relatively resistant to short- to medium-term change, while for others they are considered subject to substantial short-term change. The result is an incoherent argument.

The difficulties with attempts to integrate the two perspectives are also evident in recent treatments of group membership. Putnam and Inglehart treat group membership as a cultural variable interchangeable with trust. Thus, in Putnam’s (1993) Italian study, levels of civic engagement as reflected in group membership are considered a powerful predictor of the performance of Italy’s regional governments. Putnam’s more recent study of the United States (1995a,b,c) laments the decline in league bowling, treating this as part of a larger trend of civic disengagement in American society. Similarly, Inglehart defines social capital as “a culture of trust and tolerance, in which extensive networks of voluntary associations emerge” (1997, p. 188), thereby conflating group membership and trust.

Conspicuously absent from these treatments is a clear theoretical explanation of why trust (cast as a societal given) might facilitate group membership. Superficially the argument might appear plausible: Societies with low levels of trust would have fewer groups than those with high levels of trust. But this fails to consider the incentives to which individuals may respond. As Coleman pointed out, the road from trust to group membership comprises a number of factors, including “the actual needs that persons have for help, the existence of other sources of aid (such as government welfare services), and the degree of affluence” (1990, p. 307). Neither Putnam nor Inglehart addresses such conditioning factors.

The key issue is why individuals decide to join groups. The proposition that joining groups is a simple function of trust slight the issue of motivation. Consider the rotating credit associations that exemplify the way trust enhances group membership as described by Coleman (1990) and Putnam (1993). It is indeed unlikely that such organizations would exist if members did not trust
each other, but trust, in and of itself, does not map simply onto the formation of groups (see also Levi 1996).

The credit associations used in Putnam’s example could not have existed without the expectation by individuals that they would receive a benefit from joining the group—in this case access to capital. As Coleman observed, “These associations serve as efficient institutions for amassing savings for small capital expenditures” (1990, p. 306). The motivation for joining the group is not trust but a need for capital. And this is precisely why Coleman argued that groups are created not by trust but by such factors as the needs of individuals, the availability of other sources of aid, and levels of affluence (1990). In other words, incentives are critical in convincing individuals to join groups (see also Olson 1965, Moe 1980).

Instead of being grounded in such terms, the treatment of group formation and trust as equivalent appears to imply an optimistic form of communitarianism, where voluntary groups are always seen as intrinsically desirable. Hence, the more of them, the higher the level of trust. But before we embrace this comforting picture we need to remember that voluntary groups are often exclusionary. One person’s group can be another’s cartel. After all, membership in the Klan has been in decline over the past several decades (Newton & Newton 1991), but few would take that fact to herald dwindling social capital in the United States. Similarly, the presence of thriving voluntary associations in ethnically divided societies such as Northern Ireland, the former Yugoslavia, Rwanda, and Burundi reminds us that communitarianism is not intrinsically desirable (Hardin 1995). Trust is clearly not isomorphic with group membership.

In general, the impulse to integrate the two competing approaches to social capital is best resisted. The two approaches are built on radically different and incompatible premises, so that they cannot usefully be glued together, to use Samuelsson’s memorable phrase (1961). Further, treating social capital as exogenous (that is, as a reflection of enduring cultural norms) raises more problems than it resolves. The endogenous social capital view was explicitly cast as an alternative to cultural explanations (e.g. Granovetter 1973, 1985, 1992).

Culturalist accounts explain economic institutions as arising from cultural beliefs that predispose a group to the observed behavior.... These highly elliptical and often tautological culturalist...accounts become superfluous once the social construction of institutions is properly understood. (Granovetter 1992, p. 5)

Given the logical flaws associated with treating social capital as exogenous, it is not surprising that empirical tests of the argument are at best inconclusive.
EMPIRICAL WORK ON SOCIAL CAPITAL

We now evaluate the evidence for the exogenous social capital argument, specifically the major quantitative analyses that have received so much attention. These center on (a) Putnam’s study of regional governance in Italy and his related claim that social capital is declining in the United States, and (b) broader cross-country studies of the impact of social capital on economic and political performance.

Social Capital in Italy and the United States

Putnam’s 1993 study of the impact of social capital on the performance of Italy’s regional governments has received considerable acclaim, both within the academy and beyond (see e.g. Laitin 1995, The Economist 1993). His principal claim is that governmental performance depends on social capital as embodied in norms of civic community. Indeed, Putnam reports a correlation across 20 regions of 0.92 between his measures of civic community and institutional performance, a figure that has received a great deal of attention (e.g. Tarrow 1996, p. 391).

However, Putnam’s own data do not warrant this claim. His primary dependent variable, a composite measure of institutional performance, is flawed. That measure is constructed from a principal-components analysis that is used to extract a single composite from a total of 33 indicators of institutional performance. Unfortunately, Putnam does not demonstrate unidimensionality but simply assumes it. Had he avoided this restrictive assumption, he would have learned that his single-factor solution is not a reasonable representation of most of the information contained in the indicators and thus that his composite measure of institutional performance is incoherent. Indeed, under more standard assumptions, it is clear that a four-factor solution is optimal. Moreover, when Putnam’s composite is broken down to reflect individual dimensions of institutional performance, the evidence for social-capital effects is weak to nonexistent (see Jackman & Miller 1996a, pp. 638–45). Putnam’s statistical analyses of the Italian materials do not support his central claim.

Putnam supplements his quantitative analyses with more qualitative historical evidence to argue that regional differences in social capital can be traced back to the Middle Ages. Again, the evidence is selectively used and far from compelling. For example, he compares two maps to argue that patterns of civic community, ca 1300, resemble present patterns (1993, pp. 97, 134). But the resemblance between these maps is weak: There was no variation south of the Papal states in the medieval period, but there was considerable variation in the present (Goldberg 1996). Similarly, he derives an “iron law of civic community” from Machiavelli’s Discourses, but the provinces Machiavelli re-
garded as uncivic are the same ones to which Putnam attributes an almost unbreakable tradition of civic engagement (Sabetti 1996). More generally, Putnam’s claim implies a continuity of Italian regional differences that the historical record belies (Sabetti 1996, Tarrow 1996). Further, it ignores considerable evidence that shifting regional differences have been structurally induced (Goldberg 1996, Sabetti 1996, Tarrow 1996).

Similar problems of selectivity plague Putnam’s empirical explorations of social capital in the United States (1995a,b,c). In this study, Putnam focuses on two related dimensions of social capital: how individuals relate to each other (trust), and patterns of civic engagement as reflected in group membership. Trust is measured by the General Social Survey (GSS) question: “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?” (Davis & Smith 1993, p. 203). From this single survey item, Putnam reports that levels of social trust in the United States have declined “by about one third” (Putnam 1995c). He further claims that trends in group membership over the last two decades show that Americans have become increasingly disconnected, further evidence of declining social capital. Hence the “whimsical yet discomfiting bit of evidence of social disengagement in contemporary America.... More Americans are bowling today than ever before, but bowling in organized leagues has plummeted [by 40 percent] in the last decade or so” (Putnam 1995a, p. 70). Putnam believes this pattern of disengagement is widespread, and that overall group membership in the United States has declined by about one fourth between 1974 and 1994 (1995c).

These inferences are flawed, and Putnam’s use of the evidence is highly selective. A broader array of the available information suggests a more mixed picture, in which clear-cut signs of declining social capital are hard to find. Putnam’s claim about declining social capital in the United States is based almost exclusively on data from GSS surveys between 1974 and 1994. If we look solely at the single GSS trust item that Putnam analyzes, levels of trust do appear to have declined (by about 0.3% per year) between 1974 and 1994. Putnam’s reliance on this single item is peculiar, however, since he argued for a multiple-indicator approach in his Italian study. He used 17 indicators to measure civic culture and 33 to measure institutional performance across Italy’s 20 regions, assert-
ing that “no single metric, taken in isolation, would suffice to rate the regions fairly. Collectively, however, these indicators can undergird a broad-based assessment of institutional performance” (1993, pp. 66–67).

When we examine trends in responses to the two additional GSS items from 1974 to 1994, the patterns do not support Putnam’s claim. Over this period, Americans’ beliefs about the helpfulness of others have on average remained about the same. Although there has been a slight increase in the number of people who believe that others will take advantage of them, the trend is not statistically significant. Thus, a more inclusive approach to measurement that is consistent with the approach employed by others (e.g. Brehm & Rahn 1997) undermines the core claim about declining social trust.

Selectivity is also an issue in Putnam’s conclusion that rates of group membership in the United States have dropped by “roughly one quarter” since 1974. This claim has received much attention from political commentators and academics (The Economist 1995, Ladd 1996, Lemann 1996, Mondak & Mutz 1997, Norris 1996, Pollitt 1996, Samuelson 1996, Stengel 1996). First, it is important to note that Putnam’s statistical analysis is not based on an absolute decline in levels of group membership; it includes controls for education. Thus, his figures simply indicate that education levels have been rising faster than group membership has (Samuelson 1996). When absolute levels of participation are analyzed, there is no evidence of a decline in group membership. The Public Perspective, a Roper Center publication, devoted the entire June/July 1996 issue to the bowling-alone thesis. Contributing authors analyzed a wide array of evidence, including GSS membership data; surveys conducted by Phi Delta Kappa, Gallup, and Princeton Survey Research Associates; giving and volunteering data; church membership; and environmental activism. The editor of The Public Perspective concludes, “I was entirely unprepared for the extent of the increase [in social capital] the data in fact show. Not even one set of systematic data support the thesis of ‘Bowling Alone’” (Ladd 1996, p. 1).

For example, the proportion of the population involved in charitable and/or social service activities more than doubled between 1977 and 1995, increasing from 26% to 54% (Ladd 1996). And, Putnam to the contrary, religious-adherence rates have shown a remarkably steady increase since the formation of the Republic, rising from 17% in 1776 to a high of 64% in 1970 and dropping only slightly to 63% by 1990 (Ladd 1996, drawing on data from Finke & Stark 1992). Equally notable is the explosive growth in participation in environmental groups. Membership in the Sierra Club increased more than fivefold between 1970 and 1990, from 114,336 to 629,532 (Pettinico 1996). Although Sierra Club estimates for 1996 show membership slightly tapering off
this can hardly be construed as a significant decline in social capital.

Putnam unfortunately downplays the growth in environmental memberships, dismissing the Sierra Club as a mere “mailing list” organization with few consequences for social capital because it is “not really an organization in which members meet one another” (Putnam 1995c, p. 666). This judgment overlooks the Sierra Club Outing Department, which in 1996 offered 340 trips, including 11 days of backpacking in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the 8-day Arizona Trail Family Service trip. Such outings provide ample opportunity for civic engagement among Sierra Club members, and Putnam’s dismissal of them is unwarranted.

Local chapters of the Sierra Club provide even more opportunities for civic participation. Consider the following activities organized by the Sierra Club’s Los Angeles Chapter for a single weekend (May 17–19, 1996): 21 day hikes (including one for singles only), two evening hikes, three bicycle trips (one for singles only), one bird-watching walk, four trail-repair outings, a nature-camera excursion, a wilderness first-aid workshop, a nature-knowledge workshop, a backpacking class, a camp fundraiser, two camping trips, and one weekend trip to Catalina Island (Pettinico 1996). The Sierra Club appears to be more than a mere “mailing list” organization.

Equally curious is Putnam’s treatment of participation rates among youth. His cohort analysis of GSS and National Election Study data concludes that “the very decades that have seen a national deterioration in social capital are the same decades during which the numerical dominance of a trusting and civic generation [born between 1910 and 1940] has been replaced by the dominion of ‘post-civic’ cohorts” (1995c, p. 677). Putnam ascribes this generational shift in civic virtue to the fact that “in 1950 barely 10% of American homes had television sets, but by 1959 90% did” (1995c, p. 677).

This argument implies diminishing rates of participation as the children of the “trusting and civic generation” are replaced by those of a couch-potato “post-civic” generation. Participation in Little League baseball provides an ideal way to assess the shift from the “civic” to the “post-civic” generation, since data are available from 1939 to the present. (Little League data were provided by the Little League Baseball International Headquarters, Williamsport, PA.) Beginning with just one league of with 45 participants in 1939, participation grew to 2,014,845 in 1985, from which it declined slightly to 1,827,360 in 1988 and subsequently increased to 2,589,045 by 1995. This trend is especially noteworthy given the other organizations that now compete for members. Little League softball began in 1974 with 29,696 members and as of 1995 had 393,705. Even more remarkably, United States Youth Soccer has 2.4 million participants, a 20-fold increase in two decades (Stengel 1996). (Soccer
participation information was obtained from the United States Youth Soccer Association, Richardson, TX.) 1 A more direct example of the increasing rates of civic engagement among youth is Kids Voting USA, a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded in Arizona in 1987 to educate students about the voting process and to promote voter turnout among adults. Today Kids Voting USA has chapters in 40 states, including the District of Columbia, and involves 5 million students, 200,000 teachers, and 80,000 volunteers (see www.kidsvoting.org for further information).

Perhaps membership patterns in such groups were masked from Putnam by his use of the “Standard Question” from the GSS to measure group membership. As Baumgartner & Walker (1988) observe, this question is not sensitive to changes in the types of groups individuals join; therefore, national surveys like the GSS that use the Standard Question underestimate the actual participation rates of Americans. [The issues raised by Baumgartner & Walker (1988) are debated at greater length by Smith (1990) and Baumgartner & Walker (1990).] The problem is that the Standard Question has not been modified since it was first developed by Verba & Nie (1972). Though “ideally suited to the mid-to-late-1960s, the question progressively became a less accurate indicator of Americans’ affiliations with voluntary associations” (Baumgartner & Walker 1988, p. 914). These authors identify two reasons: First, because additional categories (e.g. fraternal, literary) were not added to the Standard Question, it was blind to new types of groups that formed after 1967, such as civil rights, environmental, and consumer movements; second, the question only allows a single affiliation within each category, “overlooking the explosive growth of the number of groups within certain types” (Baumgartner & Walker 1988, p. 914).

Baumgartner & Walker illustrate the bias this can introduce by comparing the group-membership results they would have obtained using the Standard

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1One possible objection to this argument is that the trend in Little League baseball (and youth soccer) simply reflects the increasing number of children. To investigate this, we regressed baseball and soccer participation (in tens of thousands) one year, controlling for the number (in thousands) of children enrolled in kindergarten through eighth grade from 1964 to 1995 (data on student enrollment are unavailable before 1964). The estimates we obtain are:

\[
\text{Baseball} = -299.4 + 4.481 \times \text{(year)} + 0.0039 \times \text{(enrollment)}
\]

\[
R^2 = 0.95, \quad N = 32,
\]

where t-ratios are listed in parentheses below the coefficient estimates. These estimates indicate that controlling for the change in the number of students enrolled in kindergarten through the eighth grade, participation in Little League baseball has been increasing by roughly 45,000 members per year. The estimates for a parallel analysis of US Youth Soccer participation indicate that, controlling for kindergarten through eighth grade enrollment, membership has been increasing by about 105,000 per year since the league’s formation.
Question with those of their 1985 National Election Study Pilot survey. When multiple memberships are allowed, the percentage of respondents reporting three or more memberships almost doubles, from 17.7% to 29.4%, “an impressive increase from such a modest change in coding and question administration” (Baumgartner & Walker 1988, p. 920). ²

The patterns just summarized provide little evidence for the much-heralded decline of social capital in the United States. This suggests that alarmist speculation (e.g. Putnam 1995c) that television undermines other social capital–enhancing activities, such as membership in political discussion clubs, is best resisted. Putnam’s discussion of television viewing centers on the volume of viewing rather than the content. However, as Norris pointed out, “evidence regarding what American viewers tune into suggests that watching news, and particularly current affairs programs from Nightline to 60 Minutes does not seem to be damaging to the democratic health of society, and may even prove beneficial” (1996, p. 479).

Recent discussions simply assume the desirability of social capital (in the form of group membership) for political life. That is, group membership is cast as generating better citizens. The evidence available on this assumption, while limited, is discouraging. Specifically, Mondak & Mutz (1997) report that membership in voluntary organizations does not enhance rates of political discussion. The effect of group membership on such discussion rates is swamped by family connections and contacts at work. [Mondak & Mutz (1997) base their analyses on the 1984 survey of South Bend, Indiana, conducted by Huckfeldt & Sprague (1995), an informative dataset because it includes especially rich information on social networks.]

Mondak & Mutz find no evidence that group membership fosters either contact with more diverse viewpoints or more other-regarding political orientations. This reminds us that the bearing of social capital on patterns of citizenship is far from self-evident.

Social Capital Across Countries

This section evaluates broader attempts to link social capital with economic and political performance across countries. The primary flaws of these analyses are research-design problems of temporal ordering (in which “explanatory” variables too often postdate the phenomena they are invoked to explain), ex post reasoning, and the selective use of data.

²A recent analysis pools the GSS data to examine the relationship between trust (using the three GSS items) and group membership (using the GSS Standard Question), concluding that group membership has a pronounced effect on trust, while the latter has a much smaller reciprocal effect on the former (Brehm & Rahn 1997). While suggestive, this analysis is clouded by the fact that it does not consider the issues raised by Baumgartner & Walker (1988).
Most notably, Inglehart (1997) argues that there is strong cross-national evidence that cultural values influence economic growth (see also Granato et al. 1996). He evaluates the cultural explanation of economic growth against endogenous-growth models, advanced by such scholars as Barro (1991), Levine & Renelt (1992), and Helliwell (1994), which regress economic growth rates on a set of initial economic, human-capital, and other variables. Inglehart (1997) reports that social capital in the form of achievement motivation has a strong effect on growth, with human capital, investment, and initial levels of economic development controlled for. Hence his conclusion that culture matters.

However, this judgment hinges on an indefensible temporal ordering of the dependent and independent variables. Inglehart’s principal dependent variable is based on average economic growth rates from 1960 to 1989, after Levine & Renelt (1992). Initial gross national product (GNP) and primary and secondary school enrollment ratios use 1960 as a baseline, while data on rates of investment are averaged over the years from 1960 to 1989. In contrast, data for the two measured components of cultural values are drawn from the World Values Survey for 1990 (Inglehart 1997, p. 234). A major problem of temporal ordering appears to carry over from Inglehart (1990): We are told that current social capital drives growth that has already occurred.

Inglehart (1997) compounds the problem in two ways. First, he elaborates the analysis with a structural-equation model in which achievement motivation as of 1990 is used to explain growth over the prior 40 years. Second, he claims that other aspects of social capital as of 1990 (measured in terms of well-being and trust) have a significant effect on the stability of democracy during the period 1920–1995. In other words, 1990 values “explain” performance over the previous 70 years.

Perhaps labeling social capital in 1990 as a significant predictor of prior performance is less awkward than we believe. Indeed, were there evidence that the values at hand are largely time-invariant, social capital measured in 1990 might serve as a useful proxy for social capital measured in, say, 1920 or 1960. In arguing that they are a good proxy, Inglehart (1997) invokes Putnam’s (1993) assertion that values have not shifted over more than a century in Italy and, therefore, have not shifted elsewhere. Inglehart further notes that rankings of the industrialized democracies by per-capita GNP have not changed appreciably in the past 40 years and suggests that rankings of the same countries by core values have probably not changed either. The analogy is strained at best.

The direct evidence indicates that core values vary substantially over time. Indeed, the claim of stable values directly contradicts Inglehart’s well-known argument that value orientations have undergone a systematic and pronounced transformation over the past 25 years as new cohorts have replaced
their predecessors, an argument he continues to advance (Inglehart 1997). More broadly, evidence suggests that these values fluctuate over time as a function of both long- and short-term conditions, including economic performance and unemployment rates (e.g. Clarke & Dutt 1991, Clarke et al 1993, Clarke et al 1997, Duch & Taylor 1993, Abramson & Inglehart 1995, Jackman & Miller 1996a). This is evidence that values are endogenous and confirms that values measured in 1990 are a poor proxy for values at earlier periods and cannot be used to explain past performance. The only reported test that employs a temporally defensible measure of values to determine whether values affect growth shows that they do not (Jackman & Miller 1996b).

This temporal-ordering issue is part of a broader tendency toward ex post reasoning noted by others (e.g. Billig 1994). The tendency is perhaps best exemplified in arguments that explain the recent economic growth of East Asian countries in terms of Confucian values (e.g. Kahn 1979, Harrison 1992, Fukuyama 1995, Swank 1996). The case is notable because Confucian values have typically been considered growth-inhibiting (e.g. Weber 1951, Pye 1991). However, this assumption squares poorly with the dramatic growth already observed in many East Asian economies. To salvage the values-growth hypothesis, Confucianism is refurbished as a pro-growth value system in light of observed growth, and the East Asian “miracle” is thereby explained (see Jackman & Miller 1996b). The ex post reasoning is glaring.3

The problem carries over into cross-national analyses that indirectly measure values with qualitative country variables. For example, Swank (1996) tested the Confucianism-growth hypothesis with a simple dummy variable that distinguishes China, Japan, and South Korea from the other countries in his sample, even though the latter two countries are not predominantly Confucian (Pye 1985). However, because these are also the three cases with the highest rates of growth in his sample, the dummy variable labeled “Confucianism” is actually a recoded version of the dependent variable. Ex post reasoning thus leads to an empirical tautology (Jackman & Miller 1996b).

Finally, even when direct measures of values are employed, data are selectively used. Consider the measure of achievement norms that Inglehart (1997) uses to evaluate the exogenous–social capital thesis. This is calculated from 4 of 11 possible responses to a survey item asking respondents to rate “qualities which children can be encouraged to learn at home.” The four responses in-

3A similar discussion some 40 years ago centered on alleged growth-enhancing qualities of Hindu asceticism (see Singer 1956, Goheen et al 1958). That we have heard less of this claim recently doubtless reflects India’s weaker economic performance in the ensuing years. The claim stands in stark contrast to Weber’s (1958) treatment of the topic.
clude “thrift” and “determination,” but exclude “hard work,” “feeling of responsibility,” and “imagination.” No explanation is offered for this selection. Further, dimensional analyses of the disaggregated items within countries show that the four items used do not form a coherent measure of achievement norms (Jackman & Miller 1996b).

In sum, systematic efforts to treat social capital as exogenous in cross-country analyses are plagued by ex post reasoning and the selective use of data. The resulting lack of convincing empirical support for the exogenous–social capital argument is a direct outcome of the logical difficulties we have addressed and implies that the argument itself is best abandoned.

CONCLUSIONS

Recent discussions of social capital in political science have strayed considerably from the original argument. Most notably, the original argument casts social capital as endogenous, whereas recent treatments have returned to the earlier political-culture tradition, which treats values as exogenous. We have argued that these two approaches emanate from incompatible premises and have fundamentally different implications, so that attempts to integrate them are unlikely to be productive. It is thus not surprising that such efforts suffer from the internal logical inconsistencies we have discussed, most notably those concerning the durability of core values. These logical difficulties spill over into the recent empirical tests of the exogenous–social capital approach, which are selective in their use of data and employ ad hoc procedures at crucial junctures. The reported evidence for the argument evaporates when a less selective and more consistent approach to the data is adopted.

Endogenizing social capital is, as we have shown, more consistent with the social-capital argument as originally formulated. Where the old political-culture argument is plagued by logical lapses, the endogenous–social capital argument is consistent with a broader theoretical approach and accounts for important phenomena in a coherent manner. On a more practical level, it has more useful policy implications that can account for observed change.

Banfield’s “Montegrano” study (1958) illustrates the superiority of the endogenous–social capital argument over the exogenous explanation. Although it originated with observations from one small village in 1954–1955, Banfield’s study has had a monumental impact, motivating the exogenous–social capital arguments advanced by Harrison (1992, 1997), Fukuyama (1995), and, of course, Putnam (1993) in his analysis of civic virtue in Italy. Banfield’s study explained the backwardness of Montegrano (actually Chiaromonte, a mountain village in southern Italy) as a direct function of the “bacillus of
amoral familism” (Pizzorno 1971, p. 92) infecting its inhabitants. Since the norm was deeply ingrained, the prognosis was grim.

Against this backdrop, it is striking to learn that on visiting Chiaromonte in 1989 as part of a “pilgrimage,” Harrison found “dramatic change.”

Almost everyone was literate. Half were high school graduates. All families had television. Sixty percent had telephones. Sixty percent had automobiles. Several agricultural cooperatives had been formed. Families are now much smaller, averaging two children. A highway was built in the 1970s that cut travel time to Naples in half (from six hours to three). People now travel much more, and many attend school elsewhere. Many Chiaromontese have migrated to Northern Italy and other European countries to work, and a fair number of them have returned. (Harrison 1992, p. 80)

In just 35 years, the village has thus been completely transformed, so that, in Harrison’s words, “Chiaromonte is no longer Montegrano.”

It is difficult to construct a consistent argument that identifies the backwardness of mid-1950s Montegrano as a function of amoral familism while accommodating the Chiaromonte of 1989 as reported by Harrison. Banfield, after all, cast amoral familism not as a fleeting attitude but as a fundamental orientation to the world, an orientation too deep-seated to allow the about-face required for the pattern Harrison observed. That turnaround was abrupt, taking less than a generation and a half to complete.

When, on the other hand, we focus on the incentive structures faced by the residents of Chiaromonte, the observed change becomes much more explicable. Southern Italy after World War II was characterized by severe overpopulation problems, deforestation, and a critical shortage of arable land (Schachter 1965). Indeed, a 1952 report by the Association for the Industrial Development of the Italian South estimated that over 7 million people (42% of the southern population) lived in zones “without consistent possibilities of development” (cited in Lopreato 1965, p. 299). Generally, agricultural village populations experienced chronic insolvency, economic precariousness, poor health, and social marginalization. Lopreato further reported (1965, p. 300) that a 1952 national survey of Italian farm hands found over two thirds of them to be unhappy with “their actual life conditions.” The reasons cited for this unhappiness were “little work, irregular work, little money, high prices, hunger, and other economic reasons and various difficulties.” Given such an environment, the low levels of trust and the higher levels of present-orientation reported by Banfield in the mid-1950s constitute a sensible response. (Whether this warrants the judgmental label “amoral familism” is a separate question.)

After 1950, however, major changes came to southern Italy. Most marked was the massive pattern of emigration, fueled both by the push factors just described and the pull factors of economic growth in the north and elsewhere.
Lopreato reported that between 1951 and 1963, approximately 2,500,000 people migrated (1965; see also Goldberg 1996). This number constitutes a remarkable 14% of the total southern population of 17,433,500 in 1951, and represents an even more significant fraction of the (potentially) economically-active labor force. Over the same period, the number of employed male agricultural workers plummeted approximately 40%, from 2,689,000 to 1,661,000.

These changes elicited a political response. Most notably, national political parties came to see the articulation of southern issues as a significant source of possible votes (Lopreato 1965). The new road from Chiaromonte to Naples, reported above by Harrison, assumes new meaning in this context. Lopreato pointed to evidence that national governments increasingly recognized a “southern problem,” which they took specific measures to address. For example, a law was passed in the early 1960s to encourage the consolidation of minuscule land holdings generated by laws of inheritance into larger, more viable, economic units (Lopreato 1965).

There is thus extensive evidence to suggest that Banfield’s amoral familism constituted no more than a reasonable response to the incentives that were widespread in southern Italy at the beginning of the 1950s. Indeed, this point was raised repeatedly after the publication of Banfield’s analysis (see e.g. Marselli 1963, Pizzorno 1971, Silverman 1968). The ensuing emigration and enhanced political interest from Rome changed those incentives. Hence the “new” Chiaromonte documented by Harrison, in whose creation amoral familism was wholly incidental.

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