

Social Capital in Britain

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Recent findings show an apparent erosion in the United States over the post-war years of ‘social capital’ understood as the propensity of individuals to associate together on a regular basis, to trust one another, and to engage in community affairs. This article examines the British case for similar trends, finding no equivalent erosion. It proposes explanations for the resilience of social capital in Britain, rooted in educational reform, the transformation of the class structure, and government policy. It concludes by drawing some general lessons from the British case that stress the importance of the distributive dimensions of social capital and the impact that governments can have on it.

Political scientists have long been interested in how the organization of society and the structure of social relations might condition the effectiveness of governance and especially the stability, responsiveness or policy performance of democratic governments. Such issues can be approached from at least two perspectives. Some emphasize the importance of organizations more or less ‘purpose-built’ for the transmission of political demands or deeply implicated in the implementation of policy, such as political parties and the organized interest groups that figure prominently in analyses of pluralism, consociationalism and neo-corporatism.¹ Others stress the effects of a more diffuse set of social relations, whether rooted in the family, community, class structure or associational life, of the sort that are often said to be constitutive of political culture.²

In recent years, this second line of enquiry has been given new life by a

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¹ For classic examples, see Samuel H. Beer, *Modern British Politics* (New York: Norton, 1982); Suzanne Berger, ed., *Organizing Interests in Western Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Sidney Verba, Norman Nie and Jae-On Kim, *Participation and Political Equality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978).

² See Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture: Political Attitudes and Democracy in Five Nations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963); Harry Eckstein, *A Theory of Stable Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961); Ralf Dahrendorf, *Society and Democracy in Germany* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967).

literature built around the concept of 'social capital'.³ This literature focuses on the extent to which individuals have regular contact with others, beyond the sphere of the family or the market, and notably the kind of face-to-face relations of relative equality associated with participation in common endeavours, whether recreational, social, service-orientated or political. The premise is that the social networks generated by such patterns of sociability constitute an important form of 'social capital' in the sense that they increase the trust that individuals feel towards others and enhance their capacity to join together in collective action to resolve common problems or to ensure that governments address such problems. Higher levels of social capital have been associated with many outcomes, ranging from the prevention of crime to higher rates of economic growth, but the most significant contentions bear on the functioning of democracy.⁴ Social capital is said to facilitate effective participation in politics, the implementation of many kinds of public policy, and generalized support for the political system.⁵ In short, this is a literature that links relatively diffuse patterns of sociability to the effectiveness of democracy.

In this context, it is striking that recent studies of the United States find a secular decline in social capital there.⁶ In a country long considered the most 'civic' of nations, there appears to have been an erosion, over the past thirty years, in the propensity of individuals to associate together on a regular basis, to trust one another, and to engage in community affairs. In particular, recent generations seem to have abandoned the dense associational involvements of their parents and grandparents. The general implication is that shifts in patterns of sociability and social trust have weakened the civic engagement of Americans, understood in terms of the interest they show in public affairs, their proclivities to participate in politics, and their inclination to trust politicians. Robert Putnam has identified this trend and many are seeking to establish its causes.⁷

³ Robert D. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993); James Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1990), chap. 12; cf. Pierre Bourdieu, 'The Forms of Capital', in John G. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education* (New York: Greenwood, 1983).

⁴ Mark Granovetter, 'The Strength of Weak Ties', *American Journal of Sociology*, 78 (1973), 1360–80; Elinor Ostrom, *Governing the Commons* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); S. Knack and P. Keefer, 'Does Social Capital Have an Economic Payoff? A Cross-Country Investigation', *Quarterly Journal of Economics* 112 (1997), 1251–88.

⁵ Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*; Eric M. Uslaner, 'Democracy and Social Capital', in Mark Warren, ed., *Democracy and Trust* (forthcoming).

⁶ Robert D. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital', *Journal of Democracy*, 6 (1995), 65–78; Robert D. Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 28 (1995), 664–83.

⁷ Cf. Putnam, 'Bowling Alone' and 'Tuning In, Tuning Out'; Dietlind Stolle and Thomas Rochon, 'Are All Associations Alike? Membership Diversity, Associational Type and the Creation of Social Capital', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 42 (1998), 47–65; Uslaner, 'Democracy and Social Capital'; and Robert Wuthnow, 'The Changing Character of Social Capital in the United States' (paper presented to Bertelsmann Workshop on Social Capital, Berlin, 1997); Theda Skocpol, 'Casting Wide Nets: Federalism and Extensive Associations in the Modernizing United States' (paper presented to Bertelsmann Workshop on Social Capital, Berlin, 1997).

The purpose of this article is to examine the trajectory of social capital in another national case, that of Britain, thereby securing some comparative leverage on the problems of establishing whether this is a cross-national trend, what the causal factors behind changes in the level of social capital might be, and what consequences might follow from them.

The British case is a crucial one for these purposes. Britain has long had some of the densest networks of civic engagement in the world. Civic organization flourished during a nineteenth century that Trevelyan described as 'the age of Trade Unions, Cooperative and Benefit Societies, Leagues, Boards, Commissions, Committees for every conceivable purpose of philanthropy and culture', adding that in England 'not even the dumb animals were left unorganized'.⁸ As late as the 1950s, Almond and Verba found that, along with the United States, Britain still had the most 'civic culture' of all the nations they examined, one characterized by high levels of social trust, civic organization and political participation. Indeed, even those critical of dense social organization regard Britain as a polar case.⁹

Accordingly, if nations once rich in social capital, are now losing it, Britain should be experiencing such a decline. We can use the British case to test whether the apparent decline in levels of social capital found in the United States is a transnational phenomenon affecting all the industrialized democracies or another dimension of American exceptionalism.

Similarly, the British case should tell us something about the causes and consequences of changes in the level of social capital. Many of the factors most often adduced to explain these changes, such as shifts in the level of female labour-force participation or the growing popularity of television, are present in Britain as well as the United States. Patterns of covariation found here can be used to support or question the conclusions drawn from the American case. The presence of many cultural and political similarities between the two nations facilitates this task.

Finally, this study provides us with another set of national observations against which to assess the general viability and broader implications of the concept of social capital itself. We can ask how well the concept travels and whether the British case reveals dimensions of it that might not be apparent in the United States. For the purposes of cross-national comparability, I follow Putnam's definition of 'social capital' closely.¹⁰ My focus is on networks of

⁸ George Macaulay Trevelyan, *History of England* (London: Longman, Green, 1898), pp. 616–17; cf. Derek Fraser, *The Evolution of the British Welfare State* (London: Macmillan, 1973); David Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660–1960* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964); Frank Prochaska, *The Voluntary Impulse* (London: Faber, 1988).

⁹ Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*; Mancur Olson, *The Rise and Decline of Nations* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982).

¹⁰ It should be noted that the concept of social capital could also be used to refer to a number of other features of social organization including those associated with 'purpose-built' organizations. Cf. Peter A Hall, 'The Political Economy of Europe in an Era of Interdependence', in Herbert Kitschelt *et al.*, eds, *Continuity and Change in Contemporary Capitalism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

sociability, both formal and informal, and on the norms of social trust widely associated with such networks. Although problems of measurement necessitate an emphasis on membership in voluntary associations, I also consider trends in other forms of sociability, including participation in charitable endeavour and informal relations with neighbours and friends. Social trust is defined here, in the standard terms of this literature, as the generalized willingness of individuals to trust their fellow citizens.¹¹ However, I remain open to the possibility that various features of the concept of social capital should be called into question.

There are three parts to the analysis. In the next section, I assess overall trends in the level of social capital in Britain, utilizing multiple kinds of data and encompassing as much of the period since 1950 as possible. In the subsequent section, I attempt to explain these trends and to draw some general conclusions about the kinds of factors that might explain changes in social capital. Finally, I explore the relationship between levels of social capital and political activism in Britain. I conclude with some more theoretical observations, drawn from the British case, about how we conceptualize social capital and its broader effects.

THE TRAJECTORY OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Social capital of the sort relevant to this essay turns primarily on the degree to which people associate regularly with one another in settings of relative equality, thus building up relations of trust and mutual reciprocity. Therefore, it may be created via formal or informal patterns of sociability and should be reflected both in the general levels of trust that people have in others and in their commitment to voluntary work in the community. I will consider indicators for each of these dimensions of social capital.

Membership in Voluntary Associations

At the core of the conventional definition of social capital is membership in voluntary associations, which may be dedicated to a variety of purposes ranging from the recreational or social to the religious or political but which should share two key features to conform to existing theory. First, they should involve their members in at least some face-to-face interaction with others, a factor of importance since it is from such interaction that the capacity for generalized reciprocity is said to follow.¹² Secondly, they should engage their members in common endeavour, thereby nurturing capacities for collective action rather than simply self-help. Accordingly, changes in the membership of these kinds

¹¹ Defined in these terms, social trust can be distinguished from generalized trust in institutions and from forms of trust that are transaction-specific and likely to be affected by the institutional arrangements governing those transactions. Cf. Piotr Sztompka, 'Trust and Emerging Democracy', *International Sociology*, 11 (1996), 37–62; and Richard Rose, 'Social Capital: Definition, Measures, Implications' (paper presented to a workshop of the World Bank, 1996).

¹² Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*; Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*.

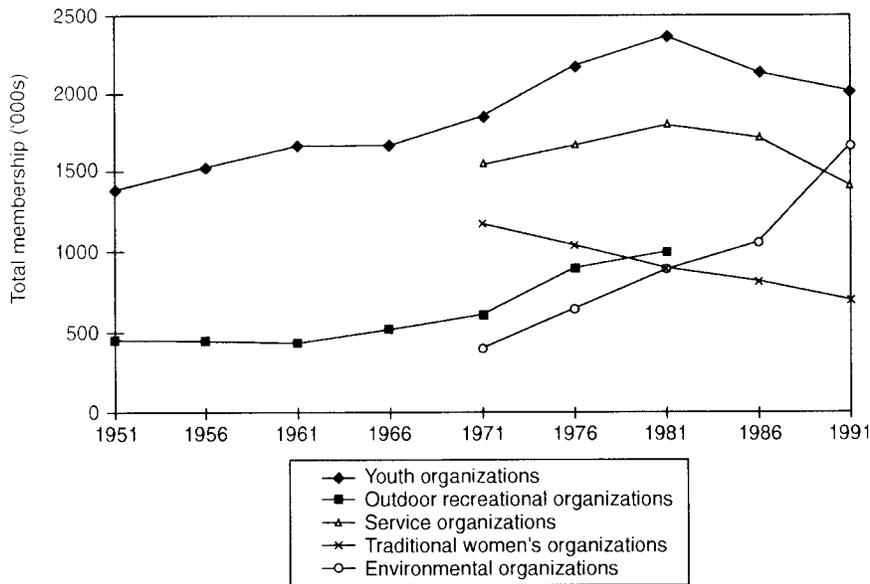


Fig. 1. Trends in total membership of various kinds of organization, 1951–91

of voluntary associations provide one of the best indicators of trends in social capital.

Figure 1 reports changes in total membership levels for all the organizations that seemed to meet these criteria in crude terms at least and for which I was able to secure long runs of data. I have divided these organizations into various types and, so that others can examine this data more closely, I report levels of membership by organization in the Appendix.¹³ Several patterns are apparent here.

First, there is considerable variation in trajectory across types of organizations and within each type. Traditional women's organizations, which tend to be orientated towards homemakers, have experienced the most striking declines in recent years, while environmental organizations, whose membership has quadrupled since 1971, have made the greatest gains.¹⁴ Among youth groups, sports clubs, service and recreational associations, some organizations have lost members, while others have gained.

¹³ Figure 1 aggregates data for fifty-one separate organizations, many of them organized in a confederal structure with local branches. Data primarily from *Social Trends* (London: HMSO, various years).

¹⁴ Membership in the National Trust has been excluded from these figures since it is the least likely of the environmental associations to involve collective interaction among its members, but its membership, too, has increased by equivalent amounts.

Secondly, with the exception of traditional women's organizations, there has not been a substantial erosion in associational membership over the long term. When an index for the average rate of membership growth per organization is calculated for each type of organization, we find positive rates of growth over the long term among all types (except traditional women's organizations) that generally exceed the rate of population growth in Britain.

Thirdly, although the overall pattern is one of modest expansion, there was some decline in membership during the 1980s, especially among youth organizations and a few service organizations, such as the Red Cross and St John's Ambulance Society. After rising for most of the post-war period from a base of 9.5 million members in 1951 to peak at 12.9 million in 1980, membership in trade unions also declined to 9.6 million in 1991. Although these very recent trends may reflect the difficult economic circumstances of the 1980s, we cannot altogether discount the possibility that they may signal broader shifts in community involvement that have yet to become fully apparent.

In general, however, average membership levels among most kinds of organizations seem to have risen at least enough to keep pace with population growth and rising levels of educational achievement through the post-war period. Moreover, this kind of time-series data, which tracks membership in organizations that have been in existence for some time, may understate the overall levels of organizational affiliation in British society. A survey of the directory compiled by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations suggests that large numbers of new voluntary organizations have been created in Britain over the past two decades; and there has been significant membership growth in new kinds of sporting organizations.¹⁵ A careful analysis of five regions for the Wolfenden Committee in 1976 found that over half of the voluntary associations there had been created since 1960; and a more recent study of 1,173 national voluntary organizations in 1992 observed that, while a quarter of them had been established before 1944, about another quarter were founded in the 1970s and a further quarter in the 1980s.¹⁶ This is confirmed by Knapp and Saxon-Harold who observe a 27 per cent increase in the number of voluntary organizations during the 1980s, reflecting the creation of three to four thousand organizations a year.¹⁷ In some cases, these are organizations formed around newly-popular causes, such as environmentalism; in other instances, they reflect an increase in kinds of co-operative endeavour that have been rendered more important by social change, such as pre-school playgroups,

¹⁵ National Council for Voluntary Organisations, *The Voluntary Agencies Directory* (London: National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 1996); cf. National Council for Voluntary Organisations, *The NEST Directory of Environmental Networks* (London: NCVO, 1993); Centre for Leisure Research, *The Sports Digest*, 3rd edn (London: Centre for Leisure Research, 1991).

¹⁶ S. Hatch, *Outside the State* (London: Croom Helm, 1980); B. Knight, *Voluntary Work* (London: Home Office, 1993).

¹⁷ Martin Knapp and S. Saxon-Harold, 'The British Voluntary Sector' (Discussion Paper 645, Personal Social Services Unit, University of Kent, Canterbury, 1989).

TABLE 1 *Trends in Associational Membership*

	1959	1973	1981	1990
All people	0.73	1.15	0.87	1.12
<i>Gender</i>				
Men	1.05	1.46	0.93	1.13
Women	0.43	0.90	0.81	1.11
<i>Education</i>				
Primary	0.60	0.97	0.64	0.67
Secondary	0.88	1.48	0.76	1.04
Post-secondary	1.58	2.05	1.74	2.18
<i>Social class</i>				
Upper-middle	1.13	2.24	1.57	2.15
Non-manual/clerical	0.82	1.36	0.89	1.34
Skilled manual	0.70	1.02	0.63	0.79
Low skilled manual	0.53	1.02	0.57	0.65
<i>Age</i>				
30 or under	0.63	1.14	0.71	0.90
Over 30	0.75	1.16	0.98	1.19

Note: The cells indicate the average number of associational memberships reported by each group.

Sources: 1959: *Civic Culture* survey; 1973: *Political Action* survey; 1981 and 1990: *World Values Survey*.

which now mobilize over 1.4 million volunteers in Britain.¹⁸ Thus, Figure 1 may well understate organizational involvement in Britain.

The available survey data present a very similar picture. The first row in Table 1 displays the average number of associational memberships reported by representative samples of the British electorate at five points during the post-war period.¹⁹ The results are strikingly consistent with the aggregate data. They reveal that the average number of associational memberships among the adult population grew by 44 per cent between 1959 and 1990, rising most rapidly

¹⁸ Kendall Jeremy and Martin Knapp, 'A Loose and Baggy Monster: Boundaries, Definitions and Typologies', in Justin Davis Smith *et al.*, eds, *An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector* (London: Routledge, 1995).

¹⁹ As in Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America', the cells in Table 1 report responses to a question asking for the number of different types of associations to which the respondent belongs. For details about the samples and questions in the four surveys used in this research, see Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*; Alan Marsh, *Protest and Political Consciousness* (London: Sage, 1977); Samuel Barnes and Max Kaase, eds, *Political Action: Mass Participation in Five Western Democracies* (Beverly Hills, Calif.: Sage, 1979); Ronald Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990).

during the 1960s but subsiding only slightly thereafter.²⁰ As the data for associational memberships among those at each of three levels of educational attainment suggest, the size of this increase is largely an artefact of rising educational levels within the populace as a whole. However, it is significant that associational membership does not decline among those at any given level of educational attainment.

The broad conclusions we can draw from this are, first, that the overall levels of associational membership in Britain seem to be at least as high today, and perhaps even somewhat higher, than they were in 1959 and, secondly, that, even when the respondents' levels of education are held constant, the basic inclination of the vast majority of the British populace to join associations remains roughly the same today as it was in the 1950s.²¹

These results are consistent with the evidence from a wide range of national and local studies conducted over the last ten years in Britain. In what remains the definitive study of political participation in Britain, Parry *et al.* found that two-thirds of the population belonged to at least one formal association and 36 per cent belonged to two or more in 1984–85, while others estimate that 3 million Britons serve on associations' committees each year.²² Bishop and Hoggett's detailed case-studies found 300 groups with an average membership of ninety for a population of 85,000 in a suburb of Bristol and 3,000 men playing organized football every Saturday morning in a locality of Leicester with a population of 68,000. Knight's survey of voluntary social service organizations in fourteen localities found 3,691 such organizations serving 946,000 people, in ratios that varied from 1 per 165 local residents in a Scottish town to 1 to 361 residents in an inner-city neighborhood.²³

²⁰ In 1959, 31 per cent of respondents belonged to one type of association and 17 per cent to two or more. The corresponding figures for 1977 are 29 and 25, for 1981, 31 and 21, and for 1990 they are 25 and 27. It is possible that the increase shown here for 1973 may be an artefact of the survey instrument which presented respondents with an especially long list of potential kinds of associations.

²¹ When the 1959 results are recalculated using the distribution of educational attainment present in 1990, the average number of associational memberships for the sample as a whole is 0.94, still lower than the 1.12 reported in 1990. Because the list of types of association presented to respondents varies somewhat from year to year, however, one must be cautious about attributing significance to small differences in the averages.

²² Geraint Parry *et al.*, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 90; Perri 6 and J. Fieldgrass, *Snapshots of the Voluntary Sector* (London: National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 1992).

²³ Knight, *Voluntary Work*. It should be noted that this study excluded trade unions, sports clubs, professional and church organizations. Cf. Katherine Gaskin and Justin David Smith, *A New Civic Europe? A Study of the Extent and Role of Volunteering* (London: Volunteer Centre, 1995); Justin Davis Smith, 'What We Know About Volunteering: Information from the Surveys', in Rodney Hedley and Justin Davis Smith, *Volunteering and Society* (London: National Council for Voluntary Organisations, 1992); Mark Abrams *et al.*, *Values and Social Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1985); Hatch, *Outside the State*; Julia Field and Barry Hedges, *A National Survey of Volunteering* (London: Social and Community Planning Research, 1987); Wolfenden Committee, *The Future of Voluntary Organisations* (London: Croom Helm, 1978).

Charitable Endeavour

Support for charitable endeavour can be seen as another important dimension of social capital. Volunteer work tends to bring individuals into direct contact with their neighbours and it represents a certain form of civic engagement. Accordingly, we may find some indicators here for the state of social capital in Britain.

The number of charities formally registered in Britain has risen steadily to 166,503 in 1991, as has the amount of money donated to charitable organizations, which was roughly £5 billion or £10 per person in 1993.²⁴ Even more importantly, large proportions of the British populace engage in voluntary work each year, usually orientated towards the provision of social services for the sick and elderly or the education and recreation of the young. One study found that 17 per cent of people had engaged in some form of voluntary work in 1976 and that 9 per cent did so on a weekly basis.²⁵ Although one must be cautious about comparability over time, some surveys found even higher numbers in the 1980s and 1990s. In 1981, 23 per cent of respondents to the General Household Survey reported doing some voluntary work in that year, and Goddard found that a quarter of the populace had done some voluntary work in 1992 with 15 per cent normally participating twice a week or more to produce about 20 million hours of voluntary work each week in the United Kingdom.²⁶ Other studies report that as many as a third of all citizens are now doing some voluntary work each year.²⁷ Although much of this work involves collecting money for charities, about a third of all volunteers have also served on a committee and most of the work involves face-to-face contact with others in their neighborhood.²⁸

These figures will not surprise anyone familiar with small and medium-sized British cities, where three or four charity shops, staffed by volunteers and selling goods for Oxfam, Dr Barnardo's or another charity, are usually visible on the main streets. An in-depth study of three towns for the Wolfenden Committee found substantial numbers of voluntary organizations in each (eighty-two organizations and 2,000 active volunteers in a population of 50,000; 112 organizations and 2,500 active volunteers in a population of 60,000; 239 organizations and 4,000 active volunteers in a population of 265,000).²⁹ In general, most studies of the voluntary sector in Britain today conclude that it is extensive and vibrant.

²⁴ Charities Aid Foundation, *Dimensions of the Voluntary Sector* (London: Charities Aid Foundation, 1994).

²⁵ Wolfenden, *The Future of Voluntary Organisations*, p. 35.

²⁶ Eileen Goddard, *Voluntary Work* (London: HMSO, 1994).

²⁷ Gaskin and Davis Smith, *A New Civic Europe?* p. 29.

²⁸ Goddard, *Voluntary Work*.

²⁹ Wolfenden, *The Future of Voluntary Organisations*, chap. 3.

TABLE 2 *Changes in the Use of Time (average minutes per day).*

	General time-use				Pursuits associated with social capital					
	Leisure at home	Leisure beyond home	Radio	TV	Sport	Civic duties	Social clubs	Pubs	Visit friends	All
<i>Men in full-time employment</i>										
1961	209	69	23	121	4 (9)	6 (15)	4 (10)	4 (16)	19 (43)	37
1975	207	102	5	126	7 (19)	4 (12)	8 (17)	14 (39)	21 (57)	54
1984	209	98	3	129	10 (31)	3 (13)	5 (16)	13 (41)	8 (60)	39
<i>Women in full-time employment</i>										
1961	173	61	16	93	2 (6)	2 (9)	1 (4)	0 (3)	24 (55)	29
1975	183	82	3	103	1 (6)	3 (11)	6 (13)	3 (17)	27 (69)	40
1984	188	90	2	102	2 (17)	7 (21)	2 (6)	10 (32)	21 (75)	42
<i>Women in part-time employment</i>										
1961	207	72	21	98	1 (11)	8 (13)	1 (2)	1 (4)	30 (35)	41
1975	221	99	4	112	2 (6)	5 (18)	3 (9)	3 (14)	33 (69)	46
1984	222	89	2	121	5 (17)	5 (21)	2 (9)	4 (20)	26 (75)	42
<i>Women not in paid employment</i>										
1961	257	70	25	125	1 (4)	5 (13)	1 (5)	0 (2)	34 (64)	41
1975	268	116	6	132	1 (5)	5 (16)	4 (10)	3 (14)	42 (81)	55
1984	286	95	3	147	3 (16)	6 (17)	3 (11)	4 (21)	29 (79)	45

Notes: The figures in brackets represent the percentage of each group participating in this activity. The samples for 1975 were taken in 1974–75 and for 1984 in 1983–4.

Source: Adapted from Jonathan Gershuny and Sally Jones, 'The Changing Work/Leisure Balance in Britain, 1961–1984', in John Horne *et al.*, eds, *Sport Leisure and Social Relations* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 9–50.

Informal Sociability

Participation in formal associations and voluntary work undertaken for them, of course, does not constitute the only source of social capital. The networks of face-to-face contact on which much social capital is based can be constructed or maintained via regular interaction with others in less formal settings, such as those that involve socializing with friends, conversation with neighbours, and informally-organized but regular activities undertaken with others. These kinds of informal sociability are often neglected because they are much harder to measure, but we have some basis for assessing trends in them in Britain.

Time-budget studies provide the most important source of data on informal sociability. Table 2 reports the average minutes per day spent on a variety of leisure activities by a representative sample of the British populace, divided according to their employment status, in 1961, 1974–75, and 1983–84. Over the period as a whole, the amount of leisure time available to most people increased substantially as a result of reductions in working-time and the diffusion of labour-saving devices.³⁰ However, it is notable that most groups chose to use this leisure time outside, rather than inside, the home, thereby expanding their scope for sociability. Although the amount of time spent watching television increased, these increases usually replaced time that had been spent listening to the radio.

The six right-hand columns in Table 2 display the time spent on the kind of activities outside the home that might be said to contribute to the formation of social capital. The total amount of time spent on such activities increased substantially through the 1960s and early 1970s and then declined slightly in the subsequent ten years, but it remained at least as high in 1984 as it had been in 1961. In general, the number of people participating in each kind of activity also increased, sometimes substantially. This data tends to contradict suggestions that the British have become increasingly ‘privatized’ or focused on ‘home life’ over the post-war years at the expense of contact with people outside the home.³¹ Instead, even a conservative interpretation would suggest that there has been some expansion in informal sociability over the past forty years.

³⁰ The length of the average working year in Britain fell from 2,900 hours in 1906 to 2,440 hours in 1946, 2,340 hours in 1982 and 1,800 hours in 1988 (cf. *Demos Quarterly*, 5 (1995)).

³¹ Cf. Ferdinand Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society* (London: Heinemann, 1961); John Goldthorpe *et al.*, *The Affluent Worker: Political Attitudes and Behaviour* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969), p. 107; Howard Newby *et al.*, ‘From Class Structure to Class Action: British Working Class Politics in the 1980s’, in B. Roberts *et al.*, eds, *New Approaches to Economic Life* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); R. E. Pahl and C. D. Wallace, ‘Household Work Strategies in Economic Recession’, in N. Redclift and E. Mingione, eds, *Beyond Employment* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985); ‘Neither Angels in Marble nor Rebels in Red: Privatization and Working-Class Consciousness’, in David Rose, ed., *Social Stratification and Economic Change* (London: Hutchinson: 1988), 127–49. It should be noted, however, that an increasing proportion of non-working time has been devoted to child care among all segments of the population. See Jonathan Gershuny and Sally Jones, ‘The Changing Work/Leisure Balance in Britain, 1961–1984’, in John Horne *et al.*, eds, *Sport Leisure and Social Relations* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985), pp. 9–50.

In Britain, one of the most important institutions associated with informal sociability has been the public house. Most neighbourhoods contain several such establishments and, for many decades, a visit to the pub was not only a regular feature of life for large segments of the population but one that provided an opportunity to converse with friends and neighbours. In 1953, a national survey found that a third of all men went to the pub more than once a week and another 16 per cent went once each week, although the equivalent figures for women were only 4 and 11 per cent.³² In 1957, 47 per cent of all respondents to a national survey reported visiting a pub in the past week.³³ What has been the fate of this vehicle for informal sociability?

Unfortunately, the available data on pub attendance over time is very limited. The number of public houses in Britain fell substantially from 1900, when there were 102,189 (or 31.69 per 10,000 people) to 66,057 (or 13.45 per 10,000 people) in 1978, despite a small revival during the 1970s. However, as Table 2 indicates, both the number of people visiting pubs and the amount of time they spend in them seems to have risen between the 1950s and the 1980s. Roughly speaking, these figures suggest that just under half of all men spent an hour and a half on average in a pub each week in the 1980s. Moreover, women are now much more likely to visit a pub than they were in the 1950s. In 1986, 47 per cent of women reported that they had visited a pub in the last month, compared with 65 per cent of men.³⁴ At a minimum, the pub seems to remain an important vehicle for informal sociability, at least among some segments of the populace in Britain.³⁵

Generation Effects

Although overall levels of social capital do not seem to have declined substantially in Britain since the war, it may be that they have fallen among more recent generations. If this is the case, overall levels of social capital should decline over time, as the older generations in the populace are replaced by newer ones. This possibility must be taken seriously because Putnam finds precisely such a generational effect in the United States where he argues that the activism

³² T. Carter and J. S. Downham, *The Communication of Ideas: A Study of Contemporary Influences on Urban Life* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1954), p. 96.

³³ George H. Gallup, ed., *The Gallup International Public Opinion Polls: Great Britain 1937–1975*, Vol. 1 (New York: Random House, 1976), p. 415.

³⁴ Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends* (London: HMSO, 1987).

³⁵ It should be noted that pubs seem to play a more important role in informal sociability among the working class than among the middle class; in 1953, 34 per cent of the working class visited the pub at least once a week compared to 21 per cent of the middle class: Carter and Downham, *The Communication of Ideas*. And one must bear in mind that the level of social interaction that takes place in pubs may have changed in ways not measured here. Cf. Mass Observation, *The Pub and the People* (London: Cresset, 1943 [reprinted in 1987]); Daniel E. Vasey, *The Pub and English Social Change* (New York: AMS Press, 1990).

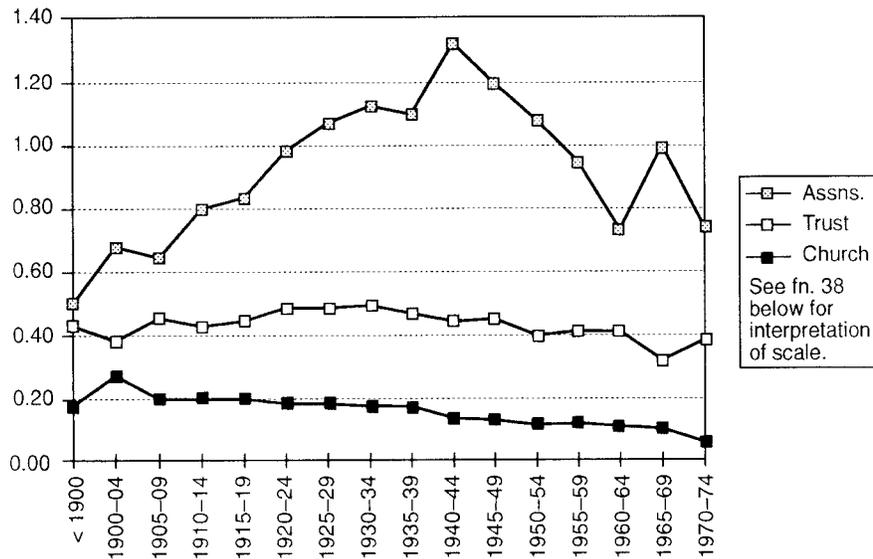


Fig. 2. Levels of associational membership, social trust and church membership by date of birth

of a 'long civic generation' born between 1910 and 1940 contrasts with the lower levels of civic engagement displayed by generations born after 1940.³⁶

Disentangling generational effects from life-cycle and period effects is notoriously difficult.³⁷ We can begin by examining Figure 2, which reports average levels of associational membership, church attendance and social trust among different age cohorts in Britain aggregated from their responses at five different points in time (1959, 1973, 1977, 1981 and 1990).³⁸ This figure shows a general rise since the turn of the century in the inclination of successive age cohorts to participate in voluntary associations, which peaks with the cohort born in 1940–44 and falls thereafter. At first glance, the chart seems to indicate that the post-war generations are less engaged in civic endeavour than the inter-war generation and have become progressively less engaged with each successive generation.³⁹

³⁶ Putnam, 'Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital'; Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out'.

³⁷ Life-cycle effects reflect differences between the young and the old which disappear as people age. Generational effects are differences between age cohorts that do not change much over time; and period effects are those that affect all age cohorts but only for specific periods of time.

³⁸ The data is drawn from the 1959 *Civic Culture*, 1973 *Political Action*, 1977 *Eurobarometer*, and 1981 and 1990 *World Values* surveys. The lines represent average number of associations to which respondents belong, the percentage reporting that they attend church regularly, and the percentage expressing social trust as defined in fn. 41 and, as appropriate, the left-hand scale should be read as a percentage or as an average number of memberships on a scale from 0.0 to 1.40.

³⁹ When the educational level of the populace is held constant, as in a similar diagram in Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out', the participation rates of the interwar generation rise, reinforcing the overall impression.

However, closer inspection suggests that the impression conveyed by Figure 2 may simply be the artefact of data limitations and a strong life-cycle effect. As many studies have confirmed, civic involvement increases substantially with age, rising from relatively low levels in a person's teens and twenties to peak in his forties and fifties.⁴⁰ Since the last point at which the data for Figure 2 could be drawn was 1990, the organizational involvement of those born after 1950 is sampled only during their teens, twenties and thirties, namely before they have reached what would normally be their peak levels of organizational involvement.

Therefore, in order to separate life-cycle from generational effects more clearly, I have drawn three generational groups from the sample – those born during the inter-war years, those born during the 1940s, and those born during the 1950s – and examine the organizational involvement of each at different ages. The results, reported in Table 3 show that, at any given age, those in the 1940s and 1950s generations tend to belong to at least as many associations as those in the inter-war generation did at that age. These results lead me to conclude, at least tentatively, that the 1940s and 1950s generations seem to be as engaged in civic terms as their inter-war counterparts.

TABLE 3 *The Average Number of Associational Memberships of Different Generations at Various Ages*

Age	Inter-war generation	1940s generation	1950s generation
20–25	0.64		0.87
26–30	0.62	1.05	1.00
31–35	0.94	1.17	1.00
36–40	1.07	1.22	1.33
41–45	1.27	1.22	
46–50	1.28	1.47	

Note: The inter-war generation was born between 1919 and 1939, the 1940s generation between 1940 and 1949 and the 1950s generation between 1950 and 1959.

Source: Survey data from the 1959 *Civic Culture* study, the 1973 *Political Action* study, the 1977 *Eurobarometer* study, and the 1981 and 1990 *World Values Survey*.

The figures that Putnam reports for the United States, of course, control for education on the premise, which I do not fully share, that it is the propensity for civic engagement independent of the effects of education that should interest

⁴⁰ Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out: The Strange Disappearance of Social Capital in America'; Parry, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*.

TABLE 4 *The Average Number of Associational Memberships of Different Generations at Various Ages Controlling for Educational Levels*

Age	Inter-war generation	1940s generation	1950s generation
20–25	0.56		0.91
26–30	0.75	1.55	1.08
31–35	1.26	1.47	1.45
36–40	1.11	1.26	1.70
41–45	1.51	1.21	
46–50	1.50	1.34	

Note: The inter-war generation was born between 1919 and 1939, the 1940s generation between 1940 and 1949 and the 1950s generation between 1950 and 1959.

Source: Survey data from the 1959 *Civic Culture* study, the 1973 *Political Action* study, the 1977 *Eurobarometer* study, and the 1981 and 1990 *World Values Survey*.

us most. In order to provide some comparability with his data, Table 4 reports an additional set of estimates for the associational involvement of these three generations at different ages, corrected in this case to standardize the level of educational attainment of each generation. Not surprisingly, this tends to raise the involvement reported for earlier generations. Those born during the 1940s seem to have had a higher propensity for civic involvement than those born between the wars and it raises some questions about whether those born in the 1950s are equally involved. Again, however, the data do not provide strong support for the contention that those born after the Second World War are less inclined to participate actively in associational life than those born before the war, as Putnam finds in the United States.

Levels of Social Trust

A slightly different picture emerges when we consider levels of social trust, understood as the general inclination of people to trust their fellow citizens.⁴¹ Here we see two key developments. First, overall levels of social trust declined

⁴¹ The survey question used to assess social trust asks, in 1959: ‘Some people say that most people can be trusted. Others say you can’t be too careful in your dealings with people. How do you feel about it?’ and, in 1981 and 1990: ‘Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with people?’ Although this is a slim measure, it is widely used elsewhere to assess levels of social capital, and responses to it are closely correlated with the responses to related questions asking how much trust people have in the British, how much importance they attach to friends, how lonely they feel as well as whether the respondent thinks people are inclined to help others, to be co-operative, to care about each other, and not to take advantage of each other – all measures for feelings of general social connectedness.

TABLE 5 *Trends in Social Trust*

	Percentage who display social trust		
	1959	1981	1990
All people	56	43	44
<i>Gender</i>			
Men	56	45	46
Women	56	42	42
<i>Education</i>			
Primary	50	37	42
Secondary	64	42	41
Post-secondary	79	60	62
<i>Social class</i>			
Upper-middle	71	58	57
Non-manual/clerical	54	48	45
Skilled manual	55	40	39
Low skilled manual	51	33	38
<i>Age</i>			
30 or under	56	41	37
Over 30	56	45	46

Note: The cells report the percentage among each group responding that 'in general, you can trust other people' rather than 'you can never be too careful', excluding responses of 'don't know', 'it depends' and 'other'.

Sources: 1959: *Civic Culture* survey; 1981 and 1990: *World Values Survey*.

between 1959 when 56 per cent of respondents said they generally trust others and 1990 when only 44 per cent said they do. There is almost certainly a general period effect here of some magnitude. Secondly, the erosion in social trust has been more substantial among some groups than others. As Table 5 indicates, the decline in social trust has been greater among the working class than the middle class. But, perhaps most striking are the differentials among age cohorts when 1959 is compared with 1990. In 1959, those under the age of 40 were substantially more trusting (61 per cent expressed trust) than those over 40 (52 per cent). By 1990, we find just the reverse: although 47 per cent of those over the age of 40 express trust in others, only 40 per cent of those under the age of 40 do so, and this proportion declines steadily with each younger age cohort to reach only 32 per cent of those between 18 and 20 years of age in 1990.

Because levels of trust among members of the inter-war generation have declined (from 61 per cent in 1959 to 46 per cent in 1990), more or less in line with the general trend, this seems to be at least as much a period effect as a generational one. However, one cannot discount the possibility that growing up in a lower-trust period will leave its mark on the younger

generations.⁴² This decline in social trust is something of an anomaly, given that other indicators suggest levels of social capital remain high, and I will return to it. For the moment, however, I turn to the problem of explaining why levels of social capital generally seem to have remained reasonably high in Britain.

EXPLAINING LEVELS OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

Conventional Causal Theories

The outcomes in the British case present us with a difficult explanatory problem. Although levels of community involvement measured by associational membership, charitable endeavour and informal sociability appear to have declined in the United States, they have remained resilient in Britain. How might this be explained? What can we learn from the British case about the general kinds of causal factors that might lie behind levels of social capital?

Several socio-economic trends common to the industrialized democracies that might otherwise be thought to erode social capital appear less important in light of the British case. These include the expansion of the welfare state, suburbanization, the growing participation of women in the labour force, and changes in family structure marked by higher rates of divorce and more single-person households. Although we cannot exclude the possibility that any of these factors might be having an effect that is offset by other factors, post-war Britain has seen each of these developments without experiencing a corresponding erosion in levels of social capital.⁴³ Changes in female labour force participation rates, working time, and family status are also largely uncorrelated at the individual level with community involvement.⁴⁴

The British case also raises questions about the causal impact of television on social capital.⁴⁵ Despite the fact that British citizens watch over two and a half hours of television per day on average, they still manage to maintain levels of sociability and community involvement commensurate with those of the late 1950s; and the generations that grew up with television do not display

⁴² Cf. David O. Sears and Nicholas A. Valentino, 'Politics Matters: Political Events as Catalysts for Preadult Socialization', *American Political Science Review*, 91 (1997), 45–65.

⁴³ The share of social spending in the gross domestic product rose from 14 per cent in 1951 to 21 per cent in 1980: Peter Flora, ed., *Growth to Limits: The West European Welfare States since World War II* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1986). The percentage of women in the labour force rose from 33 per cent in 1951 to 35 per cent in 1971 and 44 per cent in 1994 (Department of Employment, *Labour Statistics* (London: HMSO, 1995)). The proportion of families headed by a single parent rose from 8 per cent in 1971 to 23 per cent in 1994; and the proportion of people living alone rose from 9 per cent in 1973 to 15 per cent in 1994 (Central Statistical Office, *Living in Britain*, 1994). The number of divorces granted rose from 30,500 in 1951 to 110,700 in 1971 and 165,018 in 1993 (Central Statistical Office, *Annual Abstract of Statistics* (London: HMSO, 1979, 1996)). Putnam provides further reasons for thinking that these are not important causal factors in 'Tuning In, Tuning Out'.

⁴⁴ Cf. Gershuny and Jones, 'The Changing Work/Leisure Balance in Britain, 1961–1984'; Gaskin and Davis Smith, *A New Civic Europe?*

⁴⁵ Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out'; cf. Pippa Norris, 'Does Television Erode Social Capital? A Reply to Putnam', *PS: Political Science and Politics*, 29 (1996), 474–80.

significantly lower levels of community involvement than their predecessors. This suggests that television viewing need not be entirely corrosive of social capital. To some extent, it seems simply to have replaced an analogous activity popular in the inter-war years, namely, listening to the radio (cf. Table 2).

Nevertheless, it is hard to imagine that levels of social interaction outside the household would not be higher if television did not exist; and there is at least tenuous support for this in the finding that the working classes, who are less active in community associations, watch approximately a third more television than the middle classes.⁴⁶ It may be that the major effects of television had already occurred by the end of the 1950s, which is the basepoint for most of the trends reported here. There were 4.5 million television sets in Britain by 1955 and 10 million (or 211 for every 1,000 inhabitants) by the end of the decade. As early as 1953, 29 per cent of the people in Derby, a fairly typical British town, owned a television, and detailed studies of working-class life in the 1950s provide some evidence that television viewing had already cut into the time that people would otherwise spend socializing with others.⁴⁷ Thus, on the available British data, we cannot definitively reject the contention that the spread of television tends to depress levels of social interaction in the community. What the data does suggest is that television viewing need not erode that involvement altogether.

If any of these factors tend to depress levels of social capital, however, our explanatory problem becomes even more difficult: what sort of developments might have sustained aggregate levels of social capital in Britain despite countervailing pressures? Here, careful consideration of the British case draws our attention to three broad kinds of factors that are not generally emphasized in the literature on social capital but may be crucial causal variables capable of affecting the level of social capital that a nation enjoys. These are: educational policy, changes in class structure associated with post-industrialism, and government action, especially of the sort associated with the delivery of social services.

In post-war Britain, we find: (i) a radical transformation in the educational system marked by a massive expansion of both secondary and postsecondary education; (ii) a change in the overall class structure of British society, driven by economic and political developments, that has altered the distribution of occupations and life situations among the populace; and (iii) characteristically British forms of government action that have done much to encourage and sustain voluntary community involvement. Without a comparative study beyond the scope of this article, I cannot definitively establish the impact of these factors. However, I can take two steps in that direction. The first is to show that there are good reasons for thinking that each of these factors should affect the

⁴⁶ Nicholas Abercrombie and Alan Warde, *Contemporary British Society* (Oxford: Polity, 1994), p. 421.

⁴⁷ Carter and Downham, *The Communication of Ideas*; Zweig, *The Worker in an Affluent Society*, pp. 116–17, 208–9.

level of social capital; and the second is to adduce some within-case evidence for such an impact. What follows should be read as an exercise in the generation of strong hypotheses, i.e. as an effort to establish the intrinsic plausibility of three causal propositions that may help to explain levels of social capital in Britain and elsewhere.

The Results of an Educational Revolution

It is well-established that each additional year of education increases the propensity of an individual to become involved in community affairs, whether by joining an association or providing voluntary work for the community.⁴⁸ Moreover, the effect of each additional year of education on the propensity for community involvement increases as one moves from lower to higher educational levels. Thus, in the British samples drawn from both 1959 and 1990, the average effect on an individual of moving from a secondary education to a postsecondary qualification was exactly twice as great as the effect of moving from a primary educational qualification to a secondary one. As the population becomes more highly-educated, it becomes more engaged in community affairs.

In this context, the radical transformation that took place in the British educational system between the 1950s and the 1990s is of great significance. In large measure, it seems to have sustained the level of associational involvement in Britain despite countervailing pressures. The precise reforms in education are well described elsewhere. In essence, they transformed the British system of education from one that was deeply segregated by class and gender, focused on primary and secondary schooling, and very limited in the provision it made for post-secondary education in the 1950s, into one that, by the 1980s, provided most individuals with secondary education and supplied many more places in an expanded system of post-secondary education to individuals from a wider range of family backgrounds.⁴⁹ Although most of the industrialized nations took similar steps during this period, the scale of change was substantially greater in Britain than in many other nations. Over the past three decades, Britain moved from an educational system that was highly stratified by class background and provided far fewer years of schooling on average than the American system towards one that now converges on American levels.⁵⁰

This process of educational reform gave rise to three more specific developments of considerable significance for levels of social capital. First, it greatly expanded the numbers of people who secure a secondary education or

⁴⁸ Parry, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*, chap. 4; Sidney Verba, Kay Schlotzman and Henry Brady, *Voice and Equality: Civic Volunteerism in American Politics* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995); Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out'; Davis Smith, 'What We Know About Volunteering', p. 76.

⁴⁹ See A. H. Halsey, *British Social Trends since 1900* (London: Macmillan, 1988), chaps. 6 and 7.

⁵⁰ As one analyst famously observed, in the early 1960s, a working-class youth was more likely to spend time in a mental institution than to attend university in Britain (R. D. Laing, *The Politics of Experience* (London: Penguin, 1965).

post-secondary training. The representative samples of the electorate used in this study provide a good sense of these effects: the proportion of people with a secondary education doubled between 1959 and 1990 to 62 per cent, and the proportion with some post-secondary education virtually quintupled from 3 to 14 per cent.⁵¹ Secondly, this educational revolution vastly increased the educational attainment of women. By 1990, the number of women with some post-secondary education was virtually equal to that of men, compared with a ratio of only 1 to 4 in 1959. Third, educational reform substantially altered the class composition of the student body in institutions of post-secondary education and increased the numbers of people from the working class with a post-secondary education from negligible levels in 1959 to 4 per cent in 1990.⁵²

There are two routes whereby these changes in the educational system have affected levels of social capital in Britain. The first is an aggregate effect which follows directly from increasing the number of people with higher levels of education, given that higher levels of education lead to greater community involvement. Since the 1950s, this effect has raised the level of community involvement by about 25 per cent over the level that could have been expected without educational reform.⁵³

Secondly, educational reform also seems to have increased the average impact of each additional year of higher education on the recipient. In the 1950s, the experience of post-secondary education increased community involvement, on average, by about 76 per cent – a far from negligible figure.⁵⁴ By 1990, however, post-secondary education was associated with an increase in personal community involvement of 110 per cent over what could be expected on the basis of a secondary education alone. We do not know for certain how to explain this difference. However, it may well be attributable to the way in which educational reform has diversified the pool of those with access to post-secondary education. In the 1950s, when the experience of higher education was restricted mainly to male children from the upper-middle class, what it could

⁵¹ The figures derived from these samples mirror the aggregate figures quite closely. For instance, the number of full-time students in post-secondary degree programmes in 1985 (600,000) was five times higher than it had been in 1955: Michael Ball *et al.*, *The Transformation of Britain* (London: Fontana, 1989), p. 293.

⁵² It should be noted that, while increasing the absolute numbers of those from the working class who secure secondary or post-secondary education, these changes have not eliminated class inequalities in access to higher education (cf. A. H. Halsey *et al.*, *Origins and Destinations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980)).

⁵³ This figure is calculated by comparing the actual average number of associational memberships for the sample drawn in 1959 with the level it displays when the distribution of educational attainment of the 1990 sample is substituted for the relevant marginals in the 1959 data. Except where noted, in this section, community involvement is measured by average number of associational memberships.

⁵⁴ This is to say that, in 1959, the average number of associational memberships (the proxy used here for 'community involvement') reported by those with some post-secondary education was 76 per cent higher than the average number of associational memberships reported by respondents with a secondary education, while the corresponding figure in 1990 was 110 per cent. See Table 1 (p. 423) for the data.

add to the propensity of this group to participate in the community was limited by the fact that many other factors associated with the socialization of those in this class position already inclined them in this direction. By the 1990s, however, when the experience of higher education was available to a wider array of people, notably from more diverse class backgrounds, who had not had the benefit of these other socializing factors, its marginal effect on them and corresponding average effect would be greater. In short, not only do greater numbers of British citizens benefit from post-secondary education today, but the average effect of higher education seems to be substantially greater than it was during the 1950s.

The importance of the educational revolution wrought in Britain over the past three decades is especially apparent in the case of women. One of the most striking features of the British data is that, while community involvement by men increased slightly (by about 7 per cent) between 1959 and 1990, the community involvement of women more than doubled (increasing by 127 per cent) to converge with the rates of men. In short, social capital has been sustained in Britain largely by virtue of the increasing participation of women in the community. There are at least three long-term developments that might plausibly explain this: the increased exposure of women to higher education, the growing participation of women in the labour force, or more general changes in the social situation of women, including those advanced by the feminist movement. We cannot discount the importance of the latter altogether. However, the data suggest that the greater access which women secured to higher education is by far the most important factor.⁵⁵ By 1990, 14 per cent of women had some post-secondary education, compared with barely 1 per cent in 1959; and, while the level of community involvement in the 1990s of women with a primary or secondary education was not significantly different from the average level of women's involvement during the 1950s, that of women with a post-secondary education was two and a half times higher. Expanding the access of women to higher education seems to have had a major impact on levels of social capital in Britain.

The Impact of Changes in Class Structure

Social class must be an important dimension of any analysis of social change in post-war Britain. On the one hand, class divisions have long played a crucial role in the social consciousness and collective life of Britain.⁵⁶ On the other

⁵⁵ Table 1 (p. 423) shows that most of the increase in women's associational memberships had occurred by 1973, i.e. before rates of female labour force participation rose appreciably; and Table 2 (p. 426) indicates that the participation rates for and time spent on civic duties and other activities that contribute to social capital is roughly the same among women who are employed and not employed. Both of these observations suggest that, although higher rates of female labour force participation have not diminished the level of social capital, neither have they substantially increased it.

⁵⁶ Anthony Heath *et al.*, *Understanding Political Change: The British Voter 1964–1987* (Oxford: Pergamon, 1991); Geoffrey Marshall *et al.*, *Social Class in Modern Britain* (London: Hutchinson,

hand, dramatic changes have taken place in the British class structure over the past fifty years, at least some of which are likely to have broad implications for social capital.⁵⁷

Issues of social class are especially relevant to this analysis because there have long been deep differences in the connections that people in different class situations have to the community. Although such differences can be explained to some extent by levels of education, they clearly have more extensive social roots.⁵⁸ We find them in both formal and informal patterns of sociability.

On average, people in the middle class have twice as many organizational affiliations as those in the working class (cf. Table 1) and they are likely to be active in twice as many organizations. Goldthorpe found that 52 per cent of those at the top of the class structure had held office in an association versus 19 per cent of those in the bottom two class categories.⁵⁹ Professionals are also three times as likely as manual workers to participate in volunteer endeavours.⁶⁰ Moreover, while social clubs and trade unions dominate the associations to which members of the working class belong, those in the middle class develop affiliations with a much wider range of organizations. The latter are likely to join new associations at frequent intervals, accumulating memberships over their lifetimes, while those in the working class join fewer associations but stay in them for long periods of time.⁶¹

The patterns of informal sociability of the working class are more likely than those of the middle class to revolve around close contacts with kin and with a small set of friends all of whom are relatively closely connected with each other. On the whole, these are likely to be friends of long standing, often old school friends. By contrast, the social networks of the middle class tend to be more extensive and diverse. They are likely to see twice as many colleagues from work fairly regularly outside the workplace; they draw their friends from a more diverse range of sources, and those friends are often not closely connected to each other. Perhaps surprisingly, those in the middle class are also likely to know twice as many of their neighbours fairly well as do those in the working class; and much smaller numbers suffer from a complete absence of social support.

(Footnote continued)

1988); R. Pahl, *Divisions of Labour* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984); Martin Bulmer, ed., *Working Class Images of Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); Samuel Beer, *Modern British Politics* (London: Faber, 1969).

⁵⁷ John H. Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980 [2nd edn 1987]); Samuel Beer, *Britain Against Itself* (New York: Norton, 1982); Joel Krieger, *British Politics in the Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ When education is controlled, movement from the working class to the middle class increases the average number of associations to which a person belongs by about 50 per cent; and movement from the lowest class level to the highest increases the number of such memberships by almost 150 per cent.

⁵⁹ Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, 2nd edn, p. 205.

⁶⁰ Davis Smith, 'What We Know About Volunteering', p. 76; Peter Lynn and Justin Davis Smith, *The 1991 National Survey of Voluntary Activity in the UK* (London: The Volunteer Centre, 1992).

⁶¹ Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, chap. 7.

Finally, those in the middle class seem less likely to limit their interaction with friends to a particular sphere of activity in favour of engaging them in multiple kinds of endeavours.⁶²

In sum, although there are significant variations inside each class and recent research seems to contradict older assertions that the working class suffers from a serious lack of social connections, the patterns of sociability that the two principal social classes display are quite different.⁶³ Moreover, many of these differences are especially relevant for social capital.

In Britain, at least, the level of social capital seems to be most strongly sustained by the middle class. It is members of the middle class who are likely to develop wide and diverse networks of friends and to mobilize them for new endeavours; and it is the middle class who participate most actively in the widest range of formal associations, joining new ones to advance more recently developed objectives. These modalities conform more closely than do working-class patterns of sociability to classic conceptions of how social capital works. Moreover, these differences appear to be widening over time. Table 1 suggests that, while the average number of organizational affiliations among the working class has remained roughly constant over the past thirty years, those of the middle class have increased by about 60 per cent.

These observations are especially consequential because the size of the middle class itself has increased dramatically in Britain since 1950. Although we are accustomed to thinking of the class structure as something that is relatively fixed, despite individual mobility upward or downward, recent evidence indicates that the class structure of Britain has changed profoundly since the war. This transformation has been driven by the decline of an older manufacturing base, the expansion of employment in a burgeoning public sector, and the rise of the service sector. As a result, many blue-collar or manual jobs have disappeared, and there has been rapid growth in professional and white-collar positions that provide their incumbents with the material prerequisites and workplace context associated with the middle class. Goldthorpe describes the essential change as the growth of an increasingly-substantial 'service class'. Although there is some contention about precisely how the boundaries between classes should be drawn, there is general consensus on the orders of magnitude involved. The samples drawn for the British Election Studies, for instance, suggest that those in the working class fell from 51 per cent of the adult population in 1964 to 36 per cent in 1987, while those in

⁶² Ann Oakley and Lynda Rajan, 'Social Class and Social Support: The Same or Different?' *Sociology* 25 (1991), 31–59; Martin Bulmer, *Neighbours: The Work of Philip Abrams* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, 2nd edn, chap. 7; Graham Allan, 'Class Variation in Friendship Patterns', *British Journal of Sociology*, 41 (1990), 389–92; M. Stacey *et al.*, *Power, Persistence and Change* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975); Goldthorpe *et al.*, *The Affluent Worker*.

⁶³ Ian Procter, 'The Privatisation of Working Class Life: A Dissenting View', *British Journal of Sociology*, 41 (1990), 157–80; Pahl and Wallace, 'Household Work Strategies in Economic Recession'.

professional or managerial occupations associated with the 'salaried' rose from 19 per cent to 29 per cent and those in other non-manual occupations rose from 14 per cent to 20 per cent.⁶⁴ In short, in the years since the war, substantial numbers of people born into working-class families moved into middle-class occupations, as the number of white-collar positions expanded.

If the upwardly mobile had none the less maintained 'working-class' patterns of sociability, this shift in class structure would have had little effect on levels of social capital in Britain, at least until several generations had passed; and, if the upwardly-mobile had proved to be more socially-isolated by virtue of their movement, the consequences for levels of social capital would actually have been deleterious. But there is strong evidence indicating that the upwardly mobile have adopted the sociability patterns of the class into which they moved. Those entering the middle classes have had roughly the same number of organizational affiliations and friends as people born into the middle class.⁶⁵ Indeed, as one might expect, they are slightly less likely to draw on kin and more likely to draw on membership in voluntary associations for sociability than those who are middle-class from birth.

As Goldthorpe suggests, the very magnitude of the shift in post-war British class structure probably contributed to this result. If only a few individuals had been upwardly-mobile, they might have found themselves socially isolated. However, since hundreds of thousands of people experienced this kind of upward mobility in the decades after the war, the sense of social isolation that any one of them might have experienced was reduced.

In sum, the massive shift in socioeconomic structure that Britain experienced in the post-war years may have helped to sustain levels of social capital by increasing the number of middle-class occupations and putting larger numbers of people into social positions that tend to be associated with more extensive communal involvement.

The Effects of Government Policy

Although its effects are more difficult to quantify empirically, a third factor also seems to have made an important contribution to the maintenance of high levels of social capital in Britain. I refer here to the presence of particular kinds of government policy. Since the turn of the century, British governments have made great efforts to cultivate the voluntary sector, notably by involving it in the delivery of social services to a degree that seems striking in cross-national terms.⁶⁶ This is an objective to which they have also devoted substantial resources.

⁶⁴ Geoffrey Evans, 'The Decline of Class Divisions in Britain? Class and Ideological Preferences in the 1960s and 1980s', *British Journal of Sociology*, 44 (1993), 449–71; Heath *et al.*, *Understanding Political Change*.

⁶⁵ Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*, pp. 194, 204 (and *passim*).

⁶⁶ For an argument suggesting that government action may be important to social capital in other countries as well, see: Sidney Tarrow, 'Making Social Science Work across Space and Time: A

It is commonly assumed that the development of the public social programmes associated with the welfare state displaces voluntary endeavour directed at the poor and disabled; and, indeed, many early British reformers sought public social provision precisely in order to free the working classes from dependence on the charity or voluntary efforts of the upper classes.⁶⁷ However, from their very inception, many of Britain's social programmes have been designed to preserve a substantial role for voluntary endeavour. To an extraordinary extent, they have used local volunteers, in tandem with public professionals, to deliver social services. In addition, a variety of other policies have been adopted over the years to nurture the voluntary sector.

Although many believed at the time that the major social reforms of the 1905–14 Liberal government heralded the end of mutual aid societies and the frenetic philanthropic activity that had characterized the nineteenth century, Lloyd George's budget of 1914 already made provision for grants to voluntary organizations active in maternity, child care, home help and work with the blind.⁶⁸ As one analyst observes, 'relationships between the state and the voluntary sector in the inter-war years were already marked by increasing interdependence'.⁶⁹ In 1929, the public authorities provided 13 per cent of the income of charitable associations in Liverpool, and in 1932 the London County Council took steps to develop closer working relationships with voluntary organizations. By 1934 fully 37 per cent of the total income of registered charities in Britain came from the state in the form of payment for the services they provided to the community; and Macadam could hail what she described as an emerging 'new philanthropy' characterized by active co-operation between voluntary associations and the public authorities.⁷⁰

While radical, the social reforms of the post-war Labour government generally reinforced these patterns. The Disabled Persons (Employment) Act 1944, the National Health Service Act 1946, the National Assistance Act 1948 and the Children Act 1948 all made provision for the use of volunteers in the delivery of social services. A Ministry of Health circular at the time observed that: 'It will clearly be to the advantage of local authorities to make use of voluntary organisations which are providing satisfactory services, and to coordinate their work with the authorities' own services'.⁷¹ Prime Minister Clement Attlee declared that: 'We shall always have alongside the great range of public services, the voluntary services which humanize our national life and

(Footnote continued)

Critical Reflection on Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work*, *American Political Science Review*, 90 (1996), 389–97.

⁶⁷ R. H. S. Crossman, 'The Role of the Volunteer in the Modern Social Services', in A. H. Halsey, ed., *Traditions in Social Policy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1976); Maria Brenton, *The Voluntary Sector in British Social Services* (London: Longman, 1985), pp. 20–1.

⁶⁸ Brenton, *The Voluntary Sector in British Social Services*, p. 17.

⁶⁹ Justin Davis Smith, 'The Voluntary Tradition: Philanthropy and Self-Help in Britain, 1500–1945', in Davis Smith *et al.*, *An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector*, p. 25.

⁷⁰ Elizabeth Macadam, *The New Philanthropy* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1934).

⁷¹ Brenton, *The Voluntary Sector in British Social Services*, p. 18.

bring it down from the general to the particular'; and, after two reports setting the standards for British social policy, William Beveridge produced a third celebrating the role of voluntary endeavour and urging support for it.⁷²

This stance was endorsed by subsequent Conservative governments; and, in 1956, the Younghusband Committee found that voluntary activity was an 'integral part of the health and welfare services' with over three-quarters of all local councils making use of voluntary organizations to deliver services to the blind, the elderly and unmarried mothers.⁷³ A comprehensive history of British philanthropy from 1660 to 1960 noted that the intervention of the state in the twentieth century had 'extended rather than reversed the tradition of voluntary effort'.⁷⁴ Moreover, the 1960s and 1970s saw even more rapid growth in public programmes utilizing voluntary endeavour, notably in the spheres of poverty, urban renewal and child-care, where they were closely allied to a host of new voluntary associations, such as Shelter and the Child Poverty Action Group.⁷⁵ The Local Government Act of 1972 authorized local authorities to spend up to 2 pence on the rates to fund voluntary organizations, and the same year saw the establishment of the Volunteer Centre and the Voluntary Services Unit in the Home Office to co-ordinate and enhance the role of volunteer work in the provision of social services.⁷⁶

Although their objectives were multifarious, the Conservative governments of 1979–97 reinforced this general trend by encouraging local government to contract out a wide range of services to non-profit organizations, in this case in order to reduce the size of the state sector. Shortly after taking office, Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher declared: 'I believe that the voluntary movement is at the heart of all of our social welfare provision'; and, between 1976 and 1987, the income of the voluntary sector from fees and grants almost doubled.⁷⁷

By 1994–95, 12.5 per cent of the income of voluntary associations in Britain (£687 million) came from local authorities, while central government provided another £450 million (not including funding for housing), much of which went to organizations delivering social services in the spheres of community care,

⁷² Asa Briggs and A. Macartney, *Toynbee Hall: The First Hundred Years* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), pp. 35–6; Davis Smith, 'The Voluntary Tradition', p. 28; William Beveridge, *Voluntary Action: A Report on Methods of Social Advance* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1948).

⁷³ Brenton, *The Voluntary Sector in British Social Services*, p. 26.

⁷⁴ Owen, *English Philanthropy 1660–1960*, p. 597.

⁷⁵ Davis Smith, 'The Voluntary Tradition', p. 1; Brenton, *The Voluntary Sector in British Social Services*.

⁷⁶ Brenton, *The Voluntary Sector in British Social Service*, pp. 38–45; Nicholas Deakin, 'The Perils of Partnership: The Voluntary Sector and the State, 1945–1992', in Davis Smith *et al.*, *An Introduction to the Voluntary Sector*, pp. 40–65.

⁷⁷ Rodney Hedley and Justin Davis Smith, eds, *Volunteering and Society* (London: Bedford Square Press, 1992); Brian D. Jacobs, 'Charities and Community Development in Britain', in Alan Ware, ed., *Charities and Government* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989), pp. 82–112; Knapp and Saxon-Harrold, 'The British Voluntary Sector'; Ralph Kramer, 'Change and Continuity in British Voluntary Organisations, 1976–1988', *Voluntas* (1992), pp. 33–60.

family welfare, education and recreation.⁷⁸ Although many of the organizations receiving these funds employed professional staff as well as volunteers, government funding did not apparently erode their voluntary character. Leat, Tester and Unell found that local voluntary associations receiving large amounts of public money utilized more volunteers than those receiving fewer funds. Moreover, Hatch's enquiry into the origins of voluntary organizations in three towns found that public officials provided the impetus for creating more of them than did any other source.⁷⁹

In short, not only have British governments made substantial efforts to ensure that voluntary activity flourishes, they have also adopted an approach to social policy that makes extensive use of volunteers, alongside professionals, for the delivery of social services. This commitment has been accompanied by large public expenditures, via grants and fees for services, to the kinds of associations that mobilize voluntary action on the local level. All indications are that these government policies have made a major contribution to sustaining the kind of associations that augment the level of social capital in Britain.

Explaining Changes in Social Trust

The one indicator for social capital that has fallen over the post-war years is that measuring the generalized trust people express in others. We can expect a variable based on peoples' attitudes to fluctuate more than those assessing their behaviour. But there is also a secular trend here. Social trust seems to have declined among all groups between 1959 and 1980 and to have reached especially low levels among the young. How is this to be explained?

We can begin by considering two factors that might seem to be prime culprits: (i) urbanization, since those in large cities are often believed to be less familiar with their neighbours and exposed to more crime, and (ii) a 'Thatcher effect', on the grounds that the efforts made by the Conservative governments of the 1980s to break with the 'collectivist' traditions of British political culture and to promote a more 'individualistic' entrepreneurialism may have encouraged people to become more competitive and less trusting of others.⁸⁰

When closely examined, however, neither of these factors proves an adequate explanation. Residence in larger urban areas is indeed associated with lower levels of social trust in all the available data sets for most groups of people

⁷⁸ R. Pinker, 'Social Policy and Social Care: Division of Responsibility', in A. Yoder *et al.*, eds, *Support Networks in a Caring Community* (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1985), p. 106; Kramer, 'Change and Continuity in British Voluntary Organisations, 1976–1988', p. 38; Margaret Bolton *et al.*, *Shifting the Balance: The Changing Face of Local Authority Funding* (London: National Council for Voluntary Organizations, 1994), p. 2.

⁷⁹ D. Leat *et al.*, *A Price Worth Paying? A Study of the Effects of Governmental Grant Aid to Voluntary Organisations* (London: Policy Studies Institute, 1986); S. Hatch, *Outside the State* (London: Croom Helm, 1980).

⁸⁰ On the collectivist tradition, see Beer, *Modern British Politics*; and on Thatcher, see Peter Riddell, *The Thatcher Decade* (London: Martin Robertson, 1990).

except, as one might expect, the upper middle class. However, the proportion of the British population living in urban areas peaked in 1951 and has actually declined slightly since then.⁸¹ Britain has not become a more urban society during the post-war period.

Similarly, as Table 5 (p. 432) indicates, these data do not lend much support to the hypothesis of a 'Thatcher effect' since levels of social trust remained broadly stable, among most social groups, from 1981 to 1990. The one group that displays a potential Thatcher effect is that composed of individuals aged 30 or younger, whose levels of social trust fell substantially during the 1980s. Suggestions that the extended period of Conservative rule may have been especially alienating for the young, leading to lower levels of social trust, receives at least some support from the fact that, compared to any other group, substantially greater proportions of them voted for the Labour party in the 1997 election.⁸² But how much a Thatcher effect can explain ultimately seems limited: even among the young, levels of social trust dropped more substantially between 1959 and 1981 than they did during her years in office between 1981 and 1990.

What else might have mattered? Fully resolving this question would demand research that is well beyond the scope of this article.⁸³ However, there is some support in the data assembled here for three broad kinds of propositions that might guide further inquiry.

First, it is likely that shifts in a person's material position, especially of the sort that place him at a disadvantage relative to others or remove him from the social networks associated with social integration, may lower his levels of social trust. Prime candidates include divorce, movement to a larger city, or unemployment; and all the surveys examined here indicate that such experiences are associated with lower levels of social trust.⁸⁴ Of these, higher levels of unemployment seem the most likely to have affected aggregate levels of social trust between 1959 and the 1980s.

Consider the striking contrast in context between 1959 when 56 per cent of the populace expressed trust in others and the 1980s when only 44 per cent of the populace expressed such trust. Economic conditions and, perhaps even more important, perceptions of national economic well-being were very different.

In 1959, Harold Macmillan had just won re-election after a campaign

⁸¹ Bruce Wood, 'Urbanisation and Local Government', in Halsey, ed., *British Social Trends Since 1900*, pp. 322–56.

⁸² Exit polls indicate that 57 per cent of voters aged 18 to 29 supported Labour as compared to 44 per cent of the overall electorate (*Sunday Times* (14 May 1997), p. 16).

⁸³ For recent thought-provoking analyses, see: Claus Offe, 'How Can We Trust our Fellow Citizens?' (paper presented to the Seminar on the State and Capitalism since 1800, Harvard University, April 1998); Eric Uslaner, 'Democracy and Social Capital', in Mark Warren, ed., *Democracy and Trust* (forthcoming); Perri 6 *et al.*, *Handle with Care: Public Trust in Personal Information Handling by Major Organizations* (London: Demos, 1998).

⁸⁴ These relationships appear in statistically significant chi-square coefficients and in probit analyses that control for age, level of education and social class.

associated with the slogan ‘most of our people have never had it so good’. Rationing had recently ended, the economy was booming, and levels of unemployment were negligible. Only 5 per cent of the populace believed that their personal material situation was likely to worsen over the next year. Perhaps most telling given that those under the age of 40 were more trusting than their elders, this was an era when the young were more optimistic in economic terms than the old. Those aged 18–24 were preoccupied with material prosperity and identified disproportionately with the middle class. More than two-thirds believed they would be better off in two to three years time, compared with only a third of their elders.⁸⁵

By 1981, however, the state of the British economy was considerably bleaker and the economic situation less auspicious. That year, the nation was in the midst of a major recession: the rate of unemployment had doubled in two years to reach 10 per cent. Among those under the age of 25, unemployment was considerable higher, accelerating towards a peak of 23 per cent reached in 1983. It is notable that the young were now the age group expressing the lowest levels of social trust. Eighty per cent of the electorate believed that the economic situation of the country had deteriorated over the past year, and 49 per cent expected it to deteriorate further over the next year. Not surprisingly, two-thirds of people expressed disapproval with the government of the day.⁸⁶ In 1990, the economic situation was only slightly better; unemployment was again at 9 per cent, higher among the young, and substantially more people believed that the financial situation of their household would worsen during the next year than believed it would improve.⁸⁷

Without better time-series data for social trust, we cannot be certain of the impact of changing economic conditions on it. However, feelings of financial satisfaction are correlated with feelings of social trust at the individual level, and the general contrast between the economic context in 1959 and in 1981 or 1990 is substantial.⁸⁸ The personal employment experience and general economic confidence of the populace was considerably more positive in 1959, especially among the young who were more inclined to express social trust at that point. In 1981 and 1990, general economic confidence was much lower and the young, who were now the ones expressing low levels of social trust, were especially hard-hit by unemployment. It is at least plausible that the personal experience of economic insecurity and/or national ‘confidence effects’ arising from broader perceptions of the economy may have an impact on levels of social trust.

⁸⁵ Mark Abrams and Richard Rose, *Must Labour Lose?* (Harmondsworth, Midx: Penguin, 1960); David Butler and Richard Rose, *The British General Election of 1959* (London: Macmillan, 1960).

⁸⁶ *Gallup Political Index*, No. 249 (May 1981), Tables 2 and 7. Seventeen per cent of the electorate believed that the financial situation of their household would get better over the next year, and 35 per cent thought it would worsen.

⁸⁷ David Sanders, ‘Why the Conservative Party Won – Again’, in Anthony King *et al.*, *Britain at the Polls 1992* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House, 1993), p. 178.

⁸⁸ The relationship is statistically significant by a chi squared test at the 0.01 level in both the 1981 and 1990 *World Values Surveys*.

However, a broader set of factors may also have been at work here. The willingness to trust others is intimately related to what sociologists often term the character of social integration in a society, understood as the way in which people relate to others rooted in the expectations they have of others and their understanding of their own role in society.⁸⁹ There are many indications that the character of social integration shifted in Britain during the post-war decades, and some features of that shift may have affected levels of social trust.⁹⁰

The changes in social integration to which I refer are commonly described as those that reflect the movement from a 'collectivist' society to a more 'individualistic' one. Their roots lie in the changes in social structure I have already described but extend into the realm of worldviews. In the 1950s, British society was still highly stratified along class lines. Social class and class-based movements provided the principal reference points for social relations. Many in the working class, in particular, tended to be deferential towards authority figures and those in superior class positions. Others were members of solidaristic working-class communities which looked to collective class-based organizations, such as the trade-union movement and Labour party, for improvement in their social conditions.⁹¹

During the 1960s and 1970s, however, social attitudes shifted dramatically. A 'romantic revolt' against traditional sources of authority, linked to the rise of post-materialist values, reduced the deference of the general population.⁹² Voting along class lines became less common.⁹³ And even those who supported organizations that were traditionally class-based seemed to do so for instrumental purposes rather than out of feelings of class solidarity.⁹⁴ On a wide range of dimensions, social relations became less orientated around class divisions and more orientated to individual achievement.

In many respects, this movement was liberating. Class origins no longer had such a profound effect on social destinations. Society as a whole seemed less stratified. However, the transformation of a traditional social order may also have had some less desirable side effects. It may have rendered the social

⁸⁹ Cf. W. Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice* (Harmondsworth, Midx: Penguin, 1966).

⁹⁰ Although he may not agree with my formulation, I am grateful to Richard Rose for insisting that I consider this dimension of the problem.

⁹¹ A large literature develops such themes. For some important examples, see Eric Nordlinger, *The Working Class Tories* (London, MacGibbon and Kee, 1967); David Lockwood, *The Blackcoated Worker* (London, Allen & Unwin, 1958); Samuel H. Beer, *British Politics in the Collectivist Age* (London: Faber, 1969); and Runciman, *Relative Deprivation and Social Justice*.

⁹² See Samuel H. Beer, *Britain Against Itself*.

⁹³ See Bo Särilvik and Ivor Crewe, *Decade of Dealignment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); James Alt, 'Dealignment and the Dynamics of Partisanship in Britain', in Russell J. Dalton, Steven Flanagan and Paul Beck, eds, *Electoral Change in Advanced Industrial Democracies* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984); and Pippa Norris, *Electoral Change since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997).

⁹⁴ Cf. John Goldthorpe, David Lockwood, Frank Bechhofer and Jennifer Platt, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1969).

position of many people less secure and their relations with others less certain. The decline of many industrial sectors probably led to some erosion of solidarism among working-class organizations and communities.⁹⁵ The growing emphasis on individual achievement may have sharpened the sense that opportunism was an important dimension of social advancement and a pervasive feature of society. Taken together, these trends could readily have led to some decline in overall levels of social trust.

Without better time-series data, it is difficult to test this proposition. One implication, however, is that such developments may have inspired a shift in the attitudes of the British populace away from values that stress collective or communal solidarity towards ones that put more emphasis on individual opportunism; and there is some evidence about such value shifts available.

Let us distinguish between value-systems according to a dimension that can be labelled 'other-regarding' versus 'self-regarding'.⁹⁶ This refers to the degree to which, when faced with a trade-off between self-interest and the collective interest, the individual believes that it is morally justifiable to give priority to self-interest. On one side of the spectrum are those who believe that behaviour which is personally advantageous but harmful to the collectivity is not generally justifiable. On the other side are those more inclined to endorse such behaviour. It is also likely that the former will tend to endorse moral absolutism and the latter moral relativism.

I focus on this dimension of the value-system because it relates logically to a person's level of social trust. Those who think that a range of behaviours damaging to others are justifiable are presumably more likely both to engage in such behaviour and to expect it from others. Accordingly, they should trust others less. And this is precisely what we find. Those whose value systems are self-regarding tend to have significantly lower levels of social trust.⁹⁷

Has such a shift in values been occurring in Britain? Although the data to track these values across the postwar years is not available, we can exploit differences across age cohorts to assess whether such a shift may have taken place. In general, a person's basic values tend to be formed when he is young and to persist as he grows older. Accordingly, it is notable that those who grew up in

⁹⁵ Cf. Doreen Massey, *Spatial Divisions of Labour* (London: Macmillan 1984); John Westergaard *et al.*, 'After Redundancy: Economic Experience and Political Outlook among Former Steel Employees in Sheffield', in David Rose, *Social Stratification and Economic Change* (London: Hutchinson, 1988), pp. 153–92.

⁹⁶ Cf. David Riesman, *The Lonely Crowd* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950).

⁹⁷ The indicators employed here (and reported in Table 6, overleaf) were chosen from a longer list of possibilities according to the following criteria: all are acts that: (i) an ordinary individual might himself have the opportunity to do, (ii) could reasonably be expected to cause material, but not bodily harm, to others at least indirectly, and (iii) do not involve sexual behaviour or the commission of a serious felony. As such, they bear on relatively normal behaviours in which the individual faces a conflict between self-interest and the interest of others, approximating what Harding *et al.* describe as moral judgements about self-interest. Note that this relationship between these indicators and social trust remains strong when a range of controls, including age, are applied. Cf. S. Harding *et al.*, *Contrasting Values in Western Europe* (Basingstoke, Hants: Macmillan, 1986).

TABLE 6 *Opportunism and Moral Relativism among Age Groups*

Percentage in each group saying the behaviour is never justified	Age 30 or less	Over age 30
Claiming government benefits to which one is not entitled	55	78
Avoiding the fare on public transport	40	68
Cheating on taxes	40	60
Buying stolen goods	49	80
Keeping money one finds	30	59
Not reporting damage to a parked car	35	62
Lying	26	49
Littering	41	69
Endorse moral relativism	78	58

Notes: Cells report the percentage who respond 'never' when asked if the indicated behaviour is justified. Moral relativism is measured by agreement with the statement, 'There can never be absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil. What is good and evil depends entirely upon the circumstances of the time,' as opposed to the statement, 'There are absolutely clear guidelines about what is good and evil. These always apply to everyone whatever the circumstances.'

Source: Data combines responses to the *World Values Survey* in 1981 and 1990.

a more individualistic society and were under the age of 30 in Britain in 1981 and 1990 are more inclined to embrace self-regarding values than those who reached maturity in the earlier collectivist era (see Table 6). They also tend to be less trusting of others.

Of course, some of this variation may be attributable to a life-cycle effect: one can expect the young to be less respectful of social norms. But several pieces of evidence suggest that this data is not simply picking up the effects of youth but reflects longer-term shifts in social values that are likely to persist.⁹⁸ First, the young do not simply endorse a range of anti-social acts but also express more support for moral relativism. Since the latter is not a position historically associated with the young, who are often more absolutist in moral terms than their elders, this may well be picking up a broader social movement towards moral relativism. Secondly, the willingness of people of all ages to describe a range of anti-social acts as justifiable increased between 1981 and 1990. Although that shift was small, since the period is brief from the perspective of long-term value-change, it may indicate a society-wide change of broader proportions. Thirdly, on the one indicator available for comparison over a longer

⁹⁸ Cf. Sears and Valentino, 'Politics Matters'; Stephen E. Bennett, 'Why Young Americans Hate Politics and What We Should Do About It', *PS: Political Science and Politics* (1997), 47–53; Helen Wilkinson and Geoff Mulgan, *Freedom's Children: Work, Relationships and Politics for 18–34 Year Olds in Britain Today* (London: Demos, 1995).

period of time, which asks whether it is justifiable to keep money that you have found, there has been a substantial shift across the entire populace in a direction consistent with the changes found here.⁹⁹

In short, there are some indications that a range of developments associated with the changing character of social integration in Britain may have culminated in broad shifts in social values of a sort that tend to militate against social trust. Inglehart has drawn our attention to the importance of such shifts in values.¹⁰⁰ However, it is interesting to note that, while he associates the young with post-materialist values that evoke a certain social optimism, many of those who grew up in Britain during the 1970s and 1980s also seem to display a set of values that are less attractive from the perspective of social integration.¹⁰¹ This is a subject that merits further investigation.

Finally, there is a third set of propositions that might be advanced to explain the decline in social trust in Britain and that deserves serious consideration in further research. The most anomalous aspect of these findings, of course, is that levels of social trust seem to have declined while membership in secondary associations remains high. This calls into question the close association that Putnam and other analysts of social capital posit between the presence of secondary associations and high levels of social trust. However, it may be that the character of associational life has changed in such a way that membership in secondary associations is no longer as conducive to trusting relations as it once was. Two kinds of changes are relevant here. On the one hand, associations that involve people in the kind of face-to-face interaction thought to build social capital may have been replaced by others that involve little such interaction.¹⁰² On the other hand, associations dedicated to advancing some common or public interest may have diminished in size, while associations dedicated primarily to the private needs of their members could have grown. This would be relevant if organizations dedicated to some 'public' interest, whether construed in religious or political terms, build communal solidarity and social trust more effectively than those that are not.¹⁰³

A few pieces of evidence point to the potential salience of such propositions. It is notable, for instance, that, among those who have had the kind of experiences that tend to lower social trust such as divorce, unemployment or relocation to a larger city, people who belong to two or more associations are more likely to continue to express social trust than people who belong to no

⁹⁹ David Halpern, 'Changes in Moral Concepts and Values: Can Values Explain Crime?' (paper presented to the Causes of Crime Symposium, 1996).

¹⁰⁰ Cf. Inglehart, *Culture Shift in Advanced Industrial Society* and his many other works.

¹⁰¹ Of course, there is also some evidence that post-materialist values have not been as prominent in Britain as in some other nations. Cf. Marsh, *Protest and Political Consciousness*.

¹⁰² Cf. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*.

¹⁰³ Note that the micro-logic linking organizational membership to social trust here moves beyond that invoked in Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*. Cf. Claus Offe, 'How Can We Trust Our Fellow Citizens?' (paper presented to a Workshop on 'Confidence in Democratic Institutions', Washington, DC, August 1997).

organizations or to only one. The direction of causation is not clear. It may be that those who remain more trusting, for whatever reason, simply join more associations; but it is at least as plausible that those who belong to two or more organizations have more face-to-face interaction that sustains their social trust than those who belong to none or only to a single organization with which they may have limited contact. This suggests that future research should consider carefully whether organizations that once involved their members in active interaction are being replaced by ones that solicit only nominal affiliation or financial support.

Likewise, it is notable that many of the British organizations most associated with dedication to a wider public interest have experienced striking membership declines in recent years. At the end of the 1980s, for instance, barely 5 per cent of the electorate belonged to a political party, compared with about 10 per cent at the beginning of the 1960s.¹⁰⁴ Only 22 per cent of the populace declared themselves members of a church in 1980, compared with 28 per cent in 1960, and church attendance seems to have fallen even more significantly.¹⁰⁵ Although levels of trade-union membership remained robust through the 1970s, they declined by about 25 per cent during the 1980s and, as early as 1969, there was some indication that an increasing proportion of the membership had only an instrumental attachment to their trade union.¹⁰⁶ Although the growing strength of new social movements like the environmental movement represents something of a countertrend, these figures lend credence to concerns that the overall character of civic engagement in Britain may have shifted away from organizations dedicated to the public interest in favour of those that serve more narrow individual purposes. This, in turn, may have made social trust more difficult to sustain in Britain.

Once again, these are issues that cannot be resolved here and are identified in order to inspire further investigation. The fundamental point is that, beneath the apparent stability of organizational involvement in Britain, changes in the character of that involvement may be taking place that would not only explain some of the decline in social trust but might also indicate some erosion in the quality of civic engagement.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND POLITICS IN BRITAIN

Britain also provides a case in which to test some of the propositions about politics associated with theories of social capital. Given the general resilience

¹⁰⁴ Ivor Crewe, Anthony Fox and Neil Day, *The British Electorate 1963–92* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 122; David Butler and Gareth Butler, *British Political Facts 1900–1994* (London: Macmillan, 1994), p. 518.

¹⁰⁵ Peter Brierly, 'Religion', in A. H. Halsey, ed., *British Social Trends since 1900* (London: Macmillan, 1988), chap. 1; Central Statistical Office, *Social Trends 1995* (London: HMSO, 1996), chap. 13.

¹⁰⁶ Butler and Butler, *British Political Facts 1900–1994*, p. 370; and Goldthorpe *et al.*, *The Affluent Worker in the Class Structure*, chaps. 5 and 6.

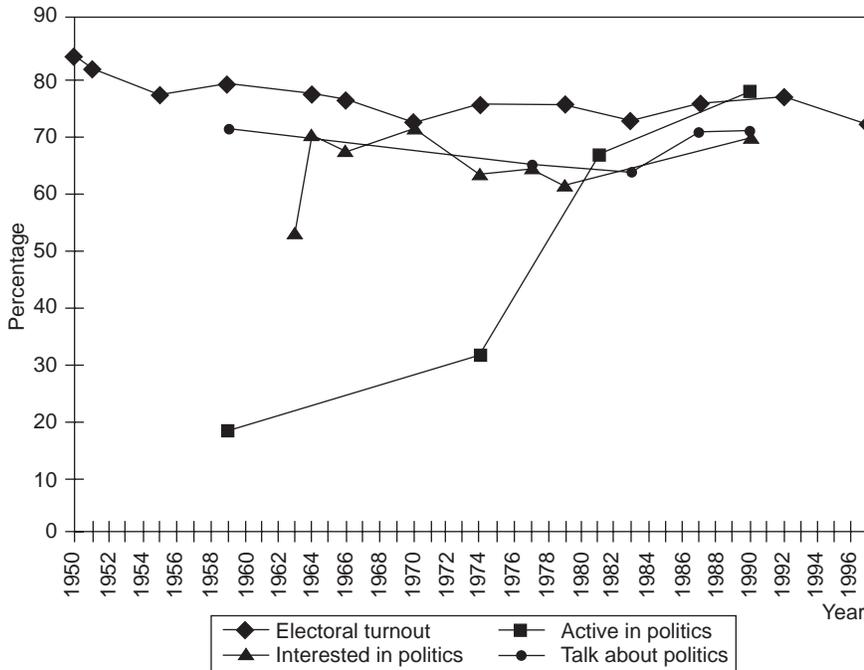


Fig. 3. Interest in politics and political activism in Britain, 1950-97

of social capital there, most of these theories predict that levels of political engagement in Britain should have remained high as well.¹⁰⁷ In general, the data bear out this proposition with regard both to political participation, whether electoral or non-electoral, and to political attentiveness measured in terms of the interest people show in politics and the frequency with which they discuss politics.

As Figure 3 indicates, electoral turnout has remained broadly stable since the mid-1950s – almost three-quarters of the British electorate still normally vote – and the number of British citizens who engage in some form of political participation beyond voting has risen dramatically.¹⁰⁸ Most of this increase reflects the growing numbers of people who sign petitions but, between 1974 and 1990, the proportion of citizens who joined a lawful demonstration, a boycott or unofficial strike also doubled, reaching almost 15 per cent of the

¹⁰⁷ Putnam, 'Bowling Alone'; Putnam, 'Tuning In, Tuning Out'.

¹⁰⁸ In Figure 3, 'Interested in politics' reflects the percentage of respondents indicating that they have some or a great deal of interest in politics; 'Active in politics' reflects the percentage who report some activity beyond voting, and 'Talk about politics' measures those who say they talk about politics at least to some extent. Sources: Crewe *et al. The British Electorate 1963-1992*; *Social Trends* (various issues); and Hans-Dieter Klingemann and Dieter Fuchs, eds, *Citizens and the State* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995).

populace.¹⁰⁹ Using slightly narrower measures, Parry and Moyser found that 24 per cent of adults were active in politics beyond voting in 1984–85.¹¹⁰

Similarly, political attentiveness has not declined noticeably in post-war Britain. The percentage of adults who never discuss politics with others was no higher in 1990 than in 1959 (30 per cent) and the proportion who frequently discussed politics with friends remained broadly stable between 1970 and 1990 at 15 to 19 per cent.¹¹¹ The portion of the populace expressing some interest in politics rose steadily during the 1960s and declined slightly during the 1970s before rising during the 1980s, but was none the less 69 per cent in 1990 compared with 53 per cent in 1963.¹¹² These figures reflect aggregate levels of political interest and activism consistent with a healthy democracy.

A substantial body of evidence also suggests that these levels of political participation and attentiveness follow directly from the high levels of associational activity and informal sociability in British society. At the individual level, in both the 1981 and 1990 surveys analysed here, attentiveness to political issues and participation in politics shows a statistically significant relationship to the number of associations to which an individual belongs.¹¹³ Mabileau *et al.* confirm this point and also find a strong correlation between political participation and informal sociability, while Gerard finds a relationship between volunteering and political activism.¹¹⁴

When we turn to two other dimensions of political behaviour normally associated with the health of democracy, however, namely those associated with political efficacy, understood as citizens' perceptions of their ability to affect political outcomes, and political trust, understood as the overall levels of trust or confidence that citizens express in their political leaders and institutions, the picture is more mixed. Many indicators suggest that feelings of political efficacy and political trust reached relatively low levels in Britain by the 1990s. Fewer than half the electorate expressed confidence in parliament or the civil service and barely half expressed confidence in the legal system.¹¹⁵ Levels of cynicism

¹⁰⁹ Richard Topf, 'Political Change and Political Culture in Britain, 1959–87', in John R. Gibbins, ed., *Contemporary Political Culture* (London: Sage, 1989), pp. 52–88, at p. 88.

¹¹⁰ Geraint Parry and George Moyser, 'A Map of Political Participation in Britain', *Government and Opposition*, 25 (1990), 147–69.

¹¹¹ Max Kaase and Kenneth Newton, *Beliefs in Government* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 47.

¹¹² Crewe *et al.*, *The British Electorate 1963–1992*, p. 153.

¹¹³ Controlling for social class, the relationship is statistically significant ($p < 0.05$) between associational membership and the importance attached to politics, interest in politics, frequency of discussion of politics, and political activism beyond voting.

¹¹⁴ Albert Mabileau *et al.*, *Local Participation in Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 211; David Gerard, 'Values and Voluntary Work', in Mark Abrams *et al.*, eds, *Values and Social Change in Britain* (London: Macmillan, 1985), pp. 201–26, at p. 216; cf. Parry, *Political Participation and Democracy in Britain*.

¹¹⁵ The percentage of respondents in 1981 and 1990 expressing 'a great deal' or 'quite a lot' of confidence (as opposed to 'not very much' or 'none at all') was 41 for parliament, 42 for the civil service and 55 for the legal system. Cf. William L. Miller *et al.*, *Political Culture in Contemporary Britain* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), pp. 47–51.

TABLE 7 *Changes in Feelings of Political Trust and Efficacy among the British Electorate*

Percentage agreeing with the following statements	1959	1974	1986
People like me have no say in what the government does	58	61	71
Politics and government are so complicated that one cannot understand what is going on	58	74	69
If Parliament passed an unjust law, I could do nothing about it	34		46*

* Measured in 1990.

Source: Richard Topf, 'Political Change and Political Culture in Britain, 1959-87', in John R. Gibbons, ed., *Contemporary Political Culture* (London: Sage, 1989), p. 56; and *World Values Survey*, 1990.

about politicians have been very high in recent decades. In both 1974 and 1986, about two-thirds of the electorate agreed that politicians are interested only in their votes rather than their opinions, tend to lose touch with the people quickly once elected, and cannot be trusted to place the needs of the country above the interests of their own party.¹¹⁶

There is considerable controversy about the extent to which feelings of political trust and efficacy have actually declined in Britain, with some arguing that they fell sharply between the 1950s and the 1970s while others maintain that they were always low and have remained stable.¹¹⁷ Unfortunately, little comparable time-series data is available and we must be cautious about extrapolating from the few indicators we have.¹¹⁸ However, as Table 7 shows,

¹¹⁶ The percentages agreeing with these statements are: 70, 66 and 57, respectively in 1986 and 67, 67 and 60 in 1974. Cf. Anthony Heath and Richard Topf, 'Educational Expansion and Political Change in Britain 1964-1983', *European Journal of Political Research*, 14 (1987), p. 554; Topf, 'Political Change and Political Culture in Britain, 1959-87', p. 56; Marsh, *Protest and Political Consciousness*.

¹¹⁷ Cf. Marsh, *Protest and Political Consciousness*; Dennis Kavanagh, 'Political Culture in Great Britain: The Decline of the Civic Culture', in Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba, eds, *The Civic Culture Revisited* (Boston, Mass.: Little Brown, 1980); Anthony Heath and Richard Topf, 'Political Culture', in Roger Jowell *et al.*, eds, *British Social Attitudes: The 1987 Report* (London: Gower, 1987), pp. 51-70; Topf, 'Political Change and Political Culture in Britain, 1959-87'.

¹¹⁸ Critics of Almond and Verba's, *The Civic Culture*, relatively positive portrait of the British point out that 83 per cent of respondents to their survey agreed that 'all candidates sound good in their speeches but you can never tell what they will do after they are elected'; Heath and Topf, 'Political Culture', p. 54.

the available measures indicate a modest decline in feelings of political trust and political efficacy. The portion of the electorate who express feelings of distrust or inefficacy increased by a consistent 10 per cent or so across each of these indicators from 1959 to the 1980s.

What might explain this decline in political trust? Given that levels of formal and informal sociability in Britain have remained relatively robust, the decline is puzzling from the perspective of theories of social capital. However, the data analysed for this study contain several clues to this puzzle.

To begin with, associational life alone does not seem to maintain levels of political trust. Both the aggregate data, which suggest that political trust has declined while associational membership remains stable, and the individual-level data point in this direction. Although membership in formal associations shows a statistically strong relationship to the political activism and attentiveness of individuals, by and large, it is not strongly correlated with their levels of political trust.¹¹⁹

However, political trust does seem to be closely associated with social trust. At the aggregate level, the two have fallen in tandem since 1959; and, at the individual level, the amount of political trust that an individual feels is strongly and significantly correlated with the amount of social trust he feels. This is logical: a lower willingness to trust others is likely to be associated with a lower willingness to trust public officials. Thus, it may be that the general decline in social trust has led to some erosion in political trust or *vice versa* or that a common set of factors has depressed both of them, although the precise lines of causation remain elusive.¹²⁰ At a minimum, these findings confirm that an active associational life does not inoculate a society against political distrust; and they tend to suggest that patterns of sociability and feelings of social trust, while connected, may be only loosely coupled. Levels of social and political trust seem to respond to a range of factors beyond patterns of sociability, which may well include the performance of the government of the day.¹²¹

The loose coupling of the key variables here contains some good news for democratic politics. It implies that moderately low levels of social and political trust need not portend a retreat from political engagement.¹²² The British polity may have been less-trusting in the 1990s than in the 1950s, but that does not seem to have impoverished it. Levels of political participation remained high

¹¹⁹ Political trust is measured here by the amount of trust the respondent expressed in parliament, the civil service and the legal system.

¹²⁰ For some indication that shifts in political trust may depress social trust, see Wuthnow, 'The Changing Character of Social Capital in the United States'.

¹²¹ Cf. Kenneth Newton, 'Social Capital and Democracy', *American Behavioral Scientist*, 40 (1997), 571–86.

¹²² Almond and Verba, *The Civic Culture*, argued some years ago that a certain level of political scepticism was healthy for democracy, although high levels of social and political distrust might discourage political engagement or encourage engagement with anti-system parties and organizations; cf. Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man: The Social Bases of Politics* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981 [2nd edn]).

during the 1990s, despite relatively low levels of trust in politicians and political institutions; and political trust was not closely correlated with political participation at the individual level. On the contrary, perhaps by virtue of being able to draw on rich associational networks, many turned their discontent into constructive, if wary, political engagement. The political image of Swampy, the countercultural hero of environmentalists' battles against superhighways in the mid-1990s, was very different from the reassuring image of Harold Macmillan, but, for many of the young in particular, he offered a model of political engagement that was equally influential.

Distributive Issues

However, the portrait of the British polity that emerges from this study is not entirely rosy. Although aggregate levels of social capital and political engagement in Britain remain high, they are distributed very unevenly across the population. For the most part, political activism and the associational life that sustains it have remained middle-class phenomena in Britain and the preserve of those in middle age. We should not let the relatively good aggregate figures for social capital confuse us into summoning up the image of a polity uniformly criss-crossed by organizational networks and participatory citizens. The more accurate image is of a nation divided between a well-connected and highly-active group of citizens with generally prosperous lives and another set of citizens whose associational life and involvement in politics are very limited.

To some degree this has been true for decades, but the most worrisome aspect of the trends identified here is that the discrepancies in levels of social capital and political engagement between the 'connected' and the 'disconnected' in Britain have not diminished over time, as social convergence theories would predict, but have grown since the 1950s. The two groups left out of civic society and increasingly marginalized from it are the working class and the young. In 1959, those in the working class belonged on average to about 62 per cent as many formal associations as those in the middle class, but by 1990 this figure was down to 45 per cent. Those aged 30 and under belonged to about 84 per cent as many associations as those over that age in 1959, but in 1990 they belonged to only 75 per cent as many. As Table 5 (p. 432) indicates, discrepancies in levels of social trust between such groups have also widened.

These differences in access to social capital are reflected in lower levels of political engagement among the working class and the young. In 1990, levels of political attentiveness were substantially higher and participation beyond voting was roughly twice as high among the middle classes as among the working class. The figures for the young are even more striking. Whereas only 27 per cent of those aged 30 or under said they never talked about politics in 1959 (which was close to the average for all respondents), 42 per cent of their counterparts in 1990 said they never talked about politics (ten points above the national average); and regular newspaper readership fell by 25 per cent between

1974 and 1993 among 15–34 year olds, while dropping only 5 per cent for the population as a whole.¹²³

There is cause for concern with respect to both groups here, but there are different implications for the future across them. The young will become older and may become more civically engaged as they do so. Some young people may already be tied into patterns of sociability so informal that studies such as this do not detect them. The principal danger is that their current levels of distrust and disengagement will prove to be a generational effect that persists over the long term.

However, the trajectory facing the working class looks considerably worse. The available evidence on working-class patterns of sociability suggests that their informal friendship networks are not structured in such a way as to be an effective substitute for associational membership, at least from the perspective of social capital. As noted earlier, members of the working class tend to have fewer friends, each associated with a specific endeavour, rather than wide networks of contacts available for many purposes.

In addition, the distinctive friendship patterns and the associational ties of the working class may be especially vulnerable to secular trends. Their friends and organizational memberships tend to be drawn heavily from the local community. Thus, movement to another locality, which the economic restructuring of Britain increasingly demands, can erode the social capital available to them dramatically. All the surveys utilized here indicate that, while movement to a large urban area does not reduce levels of social trust among the middle class, it consistently does so among the working class. Similarly, the working class draws its organizational affiliations disproportionately from trade unions and workingmen's clubs. Thus, the decline in trade-union membership, encouraged by the governments of the 1980s, may have taken an especially heavy toll on the associational life of the working class. As the traditional industrial sectors of Britain and solidaristic communities associated with them decline, workingmen's clubs also seem to be disappearing, along with the other social networks that once characterized those communities.

Caution must be exercised in extrapolating from these observations, since it is easy to over-generalize from the few portraits of working-class life we have. Many individuals may have more substantial resources than this overview tends to suggest. However, the fact that associational membership has remained flat among the working class during a period in which it has grown dramatically among the middle class implies that the levels of social capital available to the working class in Britain may not only be low but also unusually fragile in the face of contemporary social trends.¹²⁴

¹²³ Bob Tyrell, 'Time in Our Lives: Facts and Analysis on the 90s', *Demos Quarterly*, 5 (1995), 24.

¹²⁴ Moreover, the expansion of the 'salariat' which propelled many from working-class origins into the middle class was fuelled heavily by the expansion of the public sector, something that is now at an end. Cf. Goldthorpe, *Social Mobility and Class Structure in Modern Britain*.

CONCLUSION

Any effort to assess the trajectory over a long period of time of a recently-conceptualized phenomenon with existing and often imperfect data is fraught with difficulty. As in this case, the proxies used for measurement must often be relatively crude and precise time-lines difficult to establish. Accordingly, I have sought multiple measures and modest conclusions. The balance of the evidence seems to indicate, however, that aggregate levels of social capital have not declined to an appreciable extent in Britain over the post-war years. Similarly levels of civic engagement, measured in terms of interest in politics and political activism, also seem to remain relatively high, despite periodic fluctuation.

This is an important finding. It suggests that the erosion of social capital that Putnam and others find in the American case is not a uniform phenomenon across the industrialized democracies. Either the pressures generating this erosion do not operate with equal force in other nations such as Britain or there have been various counter-pressures capable of sustaining levels of political engagement and associational involvement there.

Two qualifications should be noted. There does seem to have been some decline from the 1950s to the 1980s in the generalized willingness of Britons to trust other people; and levels of social trust among the young were especially low by 1990. The willingness of those under the age of 30 to endorse opportunistic behaviour that provides private benefits at some cost to the community also seems to be greater than it is among older generations. Coupled with a downturn in membership in some kinds of associations during the 1980s, this raises the possibility that Britain may yet experience a shift in levels of social capital of the sort that already seems to have occurred in the United States.

Similarly, the aggregate data that I have used here does not tell us much about changes in the *quality* of organizational involvement in Britain. Although people still belong to secondary associations in high numbers and support charitable endeavour, it may be that the character of their involvement has shifted. Those organizations may not involve their members in as much face-to-face interaction as their predecessors once did; and there is some evidence that organizations dedicated explicitly to the public interest, whether from a religious or political perspective, have experienced larger declines than other kinds of associations. The quality of associational life in Britain clearly merits more investigation.

With respect to explaining the level of social capital that nations enjoy, this study takes several steps forward. Although I cannot definitively establish their significance without a broader comparative enquiry, I have outlined and adduced some evidence for three propositions that attribute Britain's ability to retain high levels of social capital to an educational revolution, the post-war transformation in social structure, and the emphasis put in government policy towards the delivery of social services, in particular, on the use of non-profit associations and volunteer labour.

The broader point here is that governments can and do affect the levels of social capital in their nation. To date, most of the literature has emphasized how levels of social capital affect governments and the success of their policies.¹²⁵ However, the British experience points to lines of causation that run in the other direction. Through both their educational policies and social policies, it seems that governments can have a significant effect on levels of social capital and, although it is not investigated here, potentially on the distribution of that capital through the populace. Future efforts to explain the level of social capital across nations should look closely at the impact that the actions of governments may have on it.

This study also suggests that we need to look more closely at the concept of social capital with a view to establishing its robustness and exploring some of its latent dimensions. The loose coupling found in Britain between levels of associational membership and political participation, on the one hand, and social trust and political trust, on the other, raises some questions about precisely how associational involvement affects civic engagement. It suggests that the latter may not depend as much on generalized social trust as some formulations suggest. There is clearly room for conceptual refinement here.

Similarly, the British case highlights the distributive dimensions of social capital. The very term 'social capital' draws attention to those respects in which the social networks that constitute it provide a collective resource for society as a whole. But social capital is not only a public good. It is also a 'club good' in the sense that many of its benefits are available primarily to those inside these networks. Accordingly, its distribution across the populace becomes a salient issue.

Britain as a whole undoubtedly benefited from the apparent expansion of aggregate levels of social capital since the Second World War. However, some may have gained substantially more than others. Even in the 1950s, there were substantial discrepancies between the levels of social capital found among the working class and the middle class. But those discrepancies have widened, rather than narrowed, during the post-war years. If social capital is a resource, these trends have contributed to a widening of the differences in the level of resources available to each social class; and that is a discrepancy that can be self-perpetuating since this is also a *political* resource with which economic resources are attained. The British case reminds us to be attentive not only to aggregate levels of social capital but to its distribution, that some may be organized 'in' and others 'out' by the same set of developments. In addition, because the character of social capital seems to vary across social classes, it may be that the forms of civic involvement available to the least privileged are more fragile in the face of secular trends. We need more careful examination of the kinds of social capital available to different groups in society and of the role the government plays in creating or eroding each kind.

¹²⁵ Cf. Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*; Tarrow, 'Making Social Science Work across Space and Time'.

The foundation of all such inquiries must lie in a more developed sense of precisely how different kinds of social organization relate to the effective functioning of the political system. To date, the literature on social capital has relied on a relatively traditional, if not tenuous, sense of how different patterns of sociability might bear on political action. The notion of a dense, participatory democracy that it evokes is a worthy ideal and should not be quickly abandoned. But there may be ways of operating an effective democracy in an age of new media that do not require as much face-to-face interaction among the citizenry: organizations to promote environmental concerns or the cause of the elderly that do not bring their members into direct contact with each other may still be effective political intermediaries capable of ensuring that the government remains responsive to the citizenry. It may not be as important that political parties have a large membership-base in established democracies replete with opinion polls.

In short, this article and the concept of social capital itself raise as many questions as they resolve. But they are good questions that can breathe new life into an old and important inquiry about the relationship between the functioning of democracy and social change.

TABLE A1 *Membership in Service, Environmental and Traditional Women's Organizations ('000s)*

	1971	1981	1986	1991
<i>Service organizations</i>				
Red Cross	172	112	88	82
Lions Clubs	8	20	20	21
National Association of Leagues of Hospital Friends	250	475	470	240
National Association of Round Tables of Great Britain and Ireland	29	30	28	23
National Federation of Gateway Clubs	8	32	60	77
NSPCC	20	20	25	21
Physically Disabled and Able Bodied (PHAB)	2	25	18	50
Rotary Clubs	50	59	63	65
Royal British Legion	912	934	858	766
Royal Society for Mentally Handicapped Children and Adults	40	50	55	55
St John Ambulance	91	77	60	55
Total	1,582	1,834	1,745	1,455
<i>Traditional women's organizations</i>				
Mother's Union	308	210	188	169
National Federation of Women's Institutes	440	378	347	310
National Women's Register	15	24	23	14
National Union of Townswomen's Guilds	216	155	150	100
Church of Scotland Women's Guild	127	86	68	66
Scottish Women's Rural Institutes	58	50	42	36
Association of Inner Wheel clubs	30	34	36	35
National Council of Women	6	3	2	3
Total	1,200	940	856	733
<i>Environmental organizations</i>				
Civic Trust	214	244	241	222
Conservation Trust	6	5	4	3
Council for the Protection of Rural England	21	29	32	45
Friends of the Earth	1	18	28	111
Royal Society for Nature Conservation	64	143	179	250
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	98	441	506	852
Worldwide Fund for Nature	12	60	106	227
Total	416	940	1,096	1,710

TABLE A2 *Membership in Youth and Outdoor Recreational Organizations ('000s)*

	1951	1961	1966	1971	1976	1981	1986	1991
<i>Youth organizations</i>								
Cub Scouts	192	245	246	265	296	309	332	349
Brownies	184	284	329	376	410	427	384	385
Scouts	237	272	242	215	225	234	213	192
Girl Guides	221	266	244	316	344	348	282	225
Sea Cadet Corps	19	18	18	18	19	19	17	16
Army Cadet Corps	64	44	38	39	42	46	43	39
Air Training Corps	38	30	26	33	34	35	35	34
Combined Cadet Force	58	76	49	45	43	44	43	40
Boys Brigade	142	159	143	140	137	154	120	103
Methodist Association of Youth Clubs	101	110	121	115	131	127	100	40
Boys Youth Clubs (continuous)	58	94	133	179	276	376	351	347
Girls Youth Clubs (continuous)	78	86	106	140	243	277	244	261
Total	1,392	1,684	1,695	1,881	2,200	2,396	2,164	2,031
<i>Outdoor recreational organizations</i>								
Camping Club of GB and Ireland	14	52	92	110	175	178		
Caravan Club	11	44	41	84	174	193		
Youth Hostels Association	237	219	265	264	318	316		
Ramblers Association	9	11	14	22	30	38		
British Horse Society	4	6	10	17	22	33		
The Pony Club	20	30	29	33	48	56		
British Canoe Union	1	4	3	5	6	10		
Royal Yachting Association	1	11	22	31	49	65		
British Sub-Aqua Club	2	4	7	14	25	28		
British Cycling Federation	67	21	15	11	11	16		
Cyclists Touring Club	54	26	22	19	26	38		
British Field Sports Society	27	20	18	21	50	57		
Total	447	448	538	631	934	1,028		