

THE ROLE OF FAITH-BASED NGOS IN THE PRODUCTION OF RELIGIOUS SOCIAL CAPITAL

RELIGIOUS SOCIAL CAPITAL

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PUTNAM 1.

- ⦿ Associational life contributes to the formation of social capital, which, in turn, fosters civic engagement.
- ⦿ **For present purposes, it is sufficient to note simply that the term “social capital” is generally used to denote any facet of social relations that serve to enable members of society to work together to accomplish collective goals.**

PUTNAM 2.

- It is noteworthy that relatively little scholarly attention has been given to the role of religion in social capital formation.
- Putnam himself has recognized that “faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America.”
- Yet, despite this recognition, Putnam and others have treated religion primarily as one form, among many such forms, of association.
- Little attention, as yet, has been devoted to the unique role that religion may play in building social capital.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL FORMATION

- Congregational life has traditionally been a major component of associational life in the United States.
- Not only is church affiliation the most common form of association in American life, but these associations provide important services and resources to their members and others in the community—e.g., by providing physical care, social support, and social networks.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL FORMATION

- Religious beliefs can serve to shape the level, form, and goals of one's associational life.
- Different religious doctrines may affect the ways in which people may view human nature generally, the extent to which such believers choose to relate to those outside their religious community, and the priorities given to political life generally and personal political agendas specifically.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL FORMATION

- Religious behavior may contribute to social capital formation in that volunteering, charitable contributions, and other distinct acts of mercy can, at least in the short run, help to provide a “safety net” for members of society who are “at risk.”
- Given these characteristics, Miller (1998) has asserted that religion has more potential to contribute to America's social capital than any other institution in American society.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGION AND SOCIAL CAPITAL FORMATION

- Religion's potential importance with regard to social capital formation is not limited to the extent to which religion likely contributes to social capital formation. Religion is important because of the sectors of society in which this social capital formation may occur.

INNER CITY CONTEXT

- ◉ Wood (1997), for example, argues that church-based social organizing in urban settings has proved more successful than other bases for such organizational efforts due, in large part, to the demise of other forms of civic associations in urban areas.

INNER CITY CONTEXT

- According to Wood (1997, 601), religious institutions play a distinctive role within inner-city contexts because “those settings that previously generated trust and sustained broad social networks have deteriorated badly: unions, blue-collar workplaces, cultural associations, families and so forth.”
- In fact, within many inner-city neighborhoods, religious institutions are among the few institutions that still are trusted.

RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE - TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

- It is important that we begin to specify just what types of religious cultures, structures, and values foster and promote what type of social capital.
- Some facets of different religious traditions or organizations may be relatively similar in nature (e.g., emphasizing norms of honesty and compassion), but other facets may be highly variable (e.g., organizational structures of authority).

RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE - TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Not all religious structures, for example, necessarily foster the same levels of social capital; opportunities to develop civic skills are likely to vary across religious bodies with regard to such factors as congregational size, liturgical practice, and forms of church polity.
- Participation in highly formal, bureaucratically organized religious bodies and “checkbox” participation in voluntary organizations (by giving money but not one's time) are likely to have different implications for the development of civic skills and virtues that differ from active participation in more horizontally organized, decentralized associations or congregations.

RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE - TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

- ⦿ Participation in different sectors of social life may well result in different social consequences.
- ⦿ Accordingly, one could argue that participation in religious life is likely to have disproportionate benefits with regard to social capital formation.

RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE - TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Participation in religious life tends to promote certain beliefs, values, and norms that could contribute to the formation of social capital. Generally speaking, a variety of religious norms call upon religious adherents to exhibit honesty, truthfulness, compassion, and mercy. Such qualities are likely to be those that would foster social trust.
- Religious values and involvement with religious institutions have been found to promote civic behavior in other arenas: volunteering and charitable contributions.

RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE - TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

- Religious structures have been found to generate social capital not only for their own voluntary efforts but for many other kinds of voluntary efforts as well; thus, “the social capital generated by religious structures supports not only formally religious volunteering but ‘secular’ volunteering as well”.

RELIGIOUS STRUCTURE - TYPE OF SOCIAL CAPITAL

- While religion may well serve as an integrative force in society or as a major agent in the formation of social capital, it is also true that religion can serve to deepen social cleavages in civil society.
- Greater attention needs to be given to the manner in which religious beliefs, values, and speech should be expressed in the public arena. What imagery should guide religious thinking about civic life, what standards of social behavior or civility should be utilized by believers in their relationships with others in civil society, and what guidelines should be followed in the expression of religious beliefs and values within the public square.

EVIDENCES OF RELIGIOUS SOCIAL CAPITAL

- ⦿ Two-thirds of all small groups in America are directly connected with churches and synagogues.
- ⦿ Likewise, two-thirds of those active in social movements in America claim that they draw on religious motivation for their involvement.
- ⦿ As Wuthnow states in his national study of student volunteers in America, “churches and synagogues remain the primary place where instruction is given about the spiritual dimension of caring”.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!



Presentation made based on the materials of
Corwin Schmidt (2003)