

UC Irvine

CSD Working Papers

Title

Political Support: Social Capital, Civil Society, and Political and Economic Performance

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7ks7h74n>

Author

Newton, Kenneth

Publication Date

2006-08-22

CSD Center for the Study of Democracy

An Organized Research Unit
University of California, Irvine
www.democ.uci.edu

Political support is declining in many established western democracies as citizens become more and more critical of their political leaders, their government institutions, and their system of democracy. They place less trust in their politicians; are increasingly unlikely to identify with political parties and express confidence in them; have less confidence in their main institutions of government; are more likely to believe that government is run for the benefit of a few big interests; and are more dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their country.¹ The decline involves mainly support for authorities and regimes, and has not penetrated to the community level (Easton 1965; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Dalton 2004: 45-48). National pride and support for democracy as a principle of government remain firm, but trust in politicians, confidence in political institutions, and satisfaction with democracy have declined in many, not all, of the older democracies.

This article examines the two theories of political support most frequently used to explain its decline. One is society-centered and focuses on civil society and social capital. The other is politics-centered and concentrates on the political and economic performance of governments. These are not the only theories of declining support but they are probably the strongest and most widely researched. Nor are the theories incompatible: they have been built into a single model (see Putnam, Pharr, Dalton 2000: 22-25), but more usually they are treated separately in distinct literatures.

By political support is meant (borrowing from Easton 1975: 436) the extent to which individuals evaluate political objects positively, that is, the mix of attitudes about political leaders, institutions, and the system as a whole. Attempts to explain changing attitudes, however, face a double difficulty. On the one hand, it is necessary to have time-series data for a wide range of countries to avoid culture-bound explanations and the temptation to exaggerate the importance of short-term trends. But cross-national surveys usually lack the historical and contextual detail necessary for explanations of change, and they rarely cover a long time period. To explain the dynamics of change we need the thick description of detailed country case-studies, but these may produce misleading and culture-bound generalizations. This study uses both cross-national comparisons to establish general patterns and deviations from them, and follows through with case-studies to explore the sequencing of causes and effects in four countries that show steep declines in support.

The article is divided into five parts. The first two consider performance and social capital theories separately, and the third evaluates the two together. The fourth part traces the origins and dynamics of falling political support in four countries that have experienced steep decline. The last discusses the results of the study and suggests a way of resolving the theoretical puzzle presented by the information.

Ken Newton is a Professor of Political Science at the University of Southampton, England.
K.Newton@soton.ac.uk

Performance and Political Support

The effects of both economic and political performance on support for democracy are often contingent on a variety of individual, historical and institutional factors (Beck 1988; Weil 1989; Finkel, Miller and Seligson 1989; Mischler and Rose 1997; Anderson and LoTempio 2002; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Rudolph 2003; Bengtsson 2004). Consequently the relationship between performance and political support is sometimes strong but more usually it is indirect or weak (Weil 1989; Listhaug 1995: 288-94; Listhaug and Wiberg 1995: 316-20; Kornberg and Clarke 1992; Lockerbie 1993; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Cusack 1999; Clarke, Dutt and Kornberg 1993).

Nevertheless, there is good evidence that citizens are more likely to approve of their government systems if they think they are open and fair (Miller and Listhaug 1990, 1999; Weil 1989), if they believe the government is stable and durable (Harmel and Robertson 1986), if politicians are accountable (Weatherford 1992), if government performs well in policy terms (Mishler and Rose 2001; Evans and Whitefield 1995), and the party system accommodates their interests (Weil 1989; Norris 1999: 232; Miller 1974; King 1997: 176; Borre 1995: 354), and if their civil liberties are protected (Norris 1999: 232). Recent research has shown that corruption and political scandal can have a strong effect on attitudes towards leaders, governments, and political institutions (Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1998; Bowler and Karp 2004; Seligson 2002; Anderson and Tverdova 2003; della Porta 2000; Welch and Hibbing 1997; Weatherford 1992), although their impact is mediated by political attitudes and the home-team effect (Mishler and Rose 2001).

Social Capital, Civil Society and Political Support

Although they have different intellectual origins and rather different concerns, social capital and civil society theory are close cousins; both argue that stable democracy rests on strong formal and informal social networks in the community that are independent of government, and both emphasize the importance of the social foundations of democracy, particularly the civic virtues associated with strong and dense networks of voluntary associations.

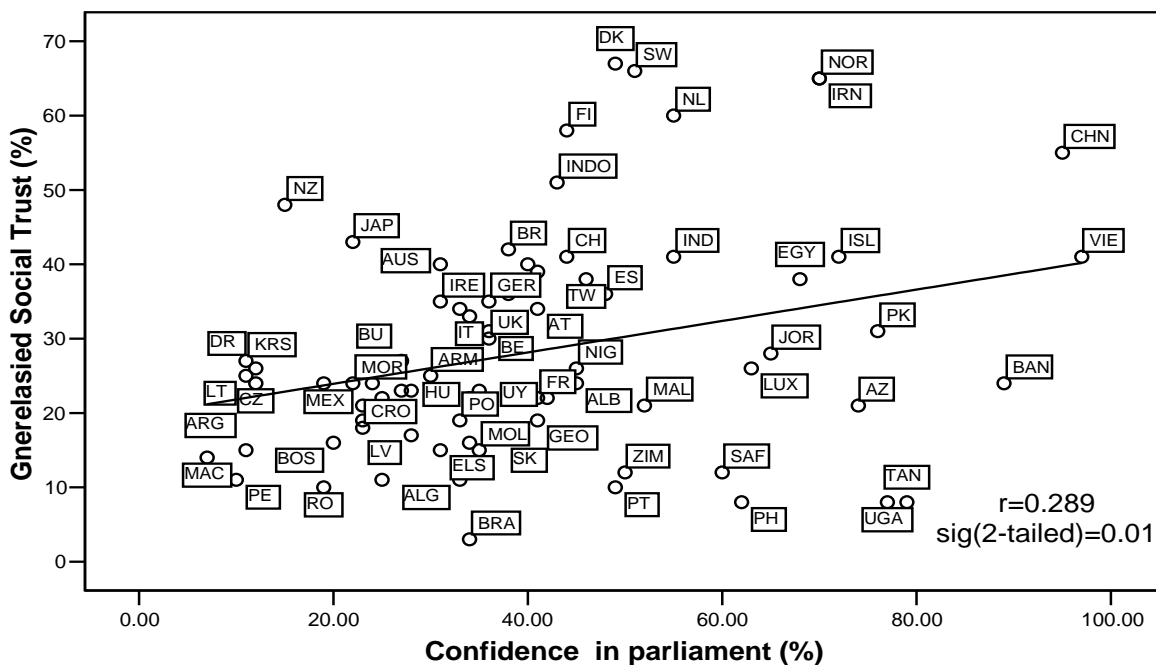
The main strength of social capital and civil society theory seems to lie less at the individual than at the aggregate national level—it is more effective in explaining the differences between countries than between individuals. As the 'rainmaker' hypothesis suggests, generalized social trust and the patterns of behavior on which it is based, provides a social climate that affects everyone in society to a greater or lesser extent, irrespective of their personal disposition to trust or distrust (Putnam, Pharr and Dalton 2000:26; Newton 1999; Newton and Norris 2000; Van der Meer 2003; Levi 1996, 1998; Newton 2001; Putnam 2000: 138; Smith, Stoker and Maloney 2004; Tarrow 1996; Foley, Edwards and Diani 2001; Delhey and Newton 2005).

Social capital theory argues that there is a virtuous circle of high trust, well established social institutions, good government, and strong popular political support, which then helps to sustain social trust between citizens, foster community and civic participation, and encourage collective activity for the common good. Research finds a syndrome of low generalized social trust, low confidence in the institutions of government, little regard for the public interest (Rothstein 2000), tax evasion (Scholz 1998), high levels of corruption (Van der Meer 2003: 147; Delhey and Newton 2005), poorly performing government (Knack and Keefer 1997; Knack 2002; Putnam 1993), a comparatively low regard for citizen rights (Knack and Keefer 1997;

Tyler 1998), and a reliance on particularized trust in order to get by in daily life (Rose 2001; Sztompka 2000). On the other side of the coin, high generalized social trust is accompanied by a respect for citizen property rights and civil liberties (Knack and Keefer 1997: 1275-6), civic cooperation (Knack and Keefer 1997: 1259), established and stable democracy (Putnam 1993, Evans 1996; Knack and Keefer 1997; Woolcock 1998: 176-8; Inglehart 1999: 102-4; Newton 1999; Booth and Richard 2001: 55; Paxton 2002; Uslaner 2002: 223-29; Delhey and Newton 2005), and high levels of confidence in political institutions (Newton 2001).

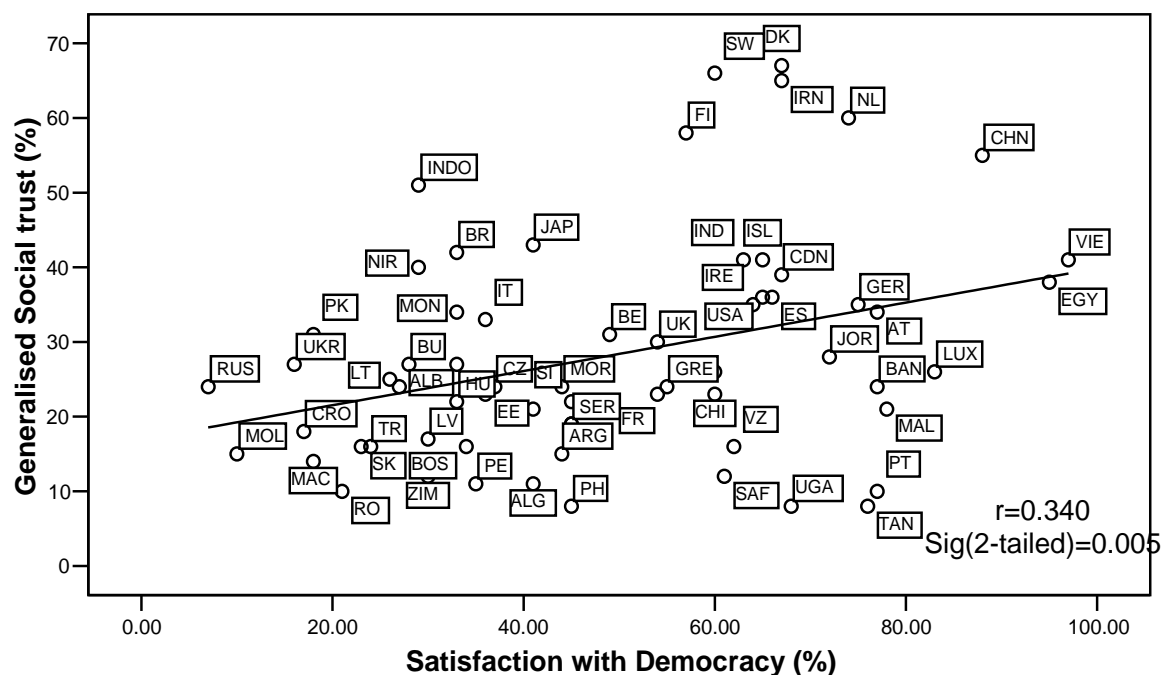
Figures 1 and 2 are consistent with this theory, showing a correspondence between generalized social trust and indicators of political support across a large number and wide variety of countries. Nevertheless, while the associations are statistically significant they are not especially strong as aggregate correlations go. We will consider some possible reasons for this in the next section, which reviews the relative strengths and weaknesses of performance and social capital theories of political support.

**Figure 1: Generalised Social Trust and Confidence
in Parliament in 79 Countries, 2000**



Note: Data are from the World Values study 1999-2002 as presented in Inglehart, et al., (2004: Tables A165 and E075). Pearson correlation. The figure presents all those countries in which questions about both social trust and confidence in parliament were asked. The question about trust was 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people' and the percentage refers to those who say 'Most people can be trusted'. The question about confidence in parliament was 'I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not very much confidence or none at all? Parliament.' The percentage figure is those who respond 'A great deal\quite a lot'.

Figure 2: Generalised Social Trust and Satisfaction with Democracy in 66 Countries, 2000



Note: The figure presents all those countries in the World values study in which questions about both social trust and satisfaction with democracy were asked. The question about satisfaction with democracy (E088) was 'On the whole are you very satisfied, rather satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy is developing in your country?' and the percentage refers to those who reply 'Very/Rather satisfied'. For other details see the note to Figure 1.

Performance and Social Capital/Civil Society Theories Reviewed

It is possible, perhaps likely, that neither performance nor social capital theory is adequate on its own to fully understand support for government, even though they are often treated independently in different and separate literatures, and even though research shows that they are mutually dependent in many ways. Indeed, it is difficult to disentangle the two theories in the real world. Economic policies can affect political support (Cusack 1999; Clarke, Dutt and Kornberg 1993), but democracy can also affect economic growth (Baum and Lake 2003), which, in turn, can influence social capital (Putnam 2000; Knack and Keefer 1997), which also affects political support (Dalton 2004). Political institutions can limit economic options and policies (Persson 2002), which can influence political support, while political support for government can also influence the outcomes of economic policies (Mishler and Rose 2001; Scholz 1998). Forms

of government and their representative procedures can create incentives for individuals to behave in ways that increase social capital (Schneider et al., 1997; Weatherford 1992: 160), just as forms of government affect the political support they get (Rohrschneider 2002). According to Paxton (2002) social capital helps to promote democratic government, which helps to generate social capital, and according to Knack (2002) and Uslaner (2002: 245) social capital helps to improve the performance of government, which affects political support. Hetherington (1998) finds that declining trust reflects dissatisfaction with leaders and institutions, which then creates a political climate that makes it more difficult for governments to succeed. Social trust may be a foundation on which democratic government can be developed, but democratic elections themselves help to improve levels of social trust (Rahn, Brehm and Carlson 1999).

In short, we should not lose sight of the fact that social capital, political performance, and political support are closely inter-dependent, a fact that helps to explain why neither of the theories, on their own, fully explain levels or changes in support. There are too many exceptions to the general rules of each. The problem is that while cross-national comparisons help us to establish general rules this sort of analysis rarely takes us far in understanding causal connections and dynamics of change. For this we need in-depth case studies to uncover historical developments and national contexts that might explain levels of political support and changes in them. An inspection of the figures shows four notable examples of declining political support in the established democracies since the 1980s—Finland, Sweden, New Zealand and Japan. These are extreme cases of declining support that are likely to reveal cause and effects relationships most clearly. If social capital and/or performance theories do not work in such limiting cases, there is less reason to believe that they will work in more typical ones.

This study makes use of secondary sources for its case study evidence. They have the advantages of being rich in detail provided by experts with an in-depth understanding of their countries, but they also have the disadvantage of being uneven in their focus and detail, no two case studies providing exactly comparable evidence about the same topics for the same time period. In what follows, the treatment of Finland is most detailed, Japan the least. Nevertheless, it is clear that all four countries display the same general patterns of changes in political support, social capital and government performance.

Four Case Studies of Declining Support

Finland

Confidence in the Finnish parliament fell heavily from 65% in 1981 to 34% in 1990. The fall was large, sudden, and especially notable because it took Finland from one of the highest in the world (second only to Norway in west Europe) to the level of Portugal, South Korea and Italy. The combined figure for confidence in the armed forces, legal system, police, parliament, and the civil service tumbled from 72% in 1980-1 to 53% in 1990-1, the largest fall in seventeen advanced democracies (Dalton 1999: 68). By the mid 1990s satisfaction with democratic performance was 52%, equal to Uruguay's, and thirty percent below Denmark and Norway. Evaluation of regime performance in the mid-1990s was even lower at 23%, the same as Estonia, Turkey and Mexico, and 47% below Norway's (Klingemann 1999: 47-50).

The slide in support did not reach the community level, however. Support for democracy, though quite low by west European standards, was still 75% in 1990, and on the measures of national pride and willingness to fight for their country the Finns, at 78%, were up with Sweden and Norway (85% and 81% respectively).

What accounts for this precipitous fall in political support, normally among the highest in the world? Generalized social trust was consistently high throughout the 1980–2000 period. It rose from 57% in 1981 to 63% in 1990, and then fell slightly to 58% in 2000. There is no indication that voluntary membership and activity declined before, during or after the collapse of political support in the 1980s. On the contrary, although Finland has one of the highest rates of voluntary group membership in the world and a strong tradition of unpaid voluntary service (Inglehart et al., eds., 2004: Tables A064–A096; Curtis, Grabb and Baer 1992: 142), its rate of new group formation remained high and individual membership increased fairly constantly after 1972 (Siisiainen 1999: 132).

Declining political support in Finland was accompanied by acute political and economic problems. A prosperous and high growth country from 1970 to 1988, Finland's economic recession between 1989 and 1993 was described as 'one of the most severe that has been endured by any OECD country in the post-war period' (OECD 2004a: 24).² Borrowing increased steeply, house and security prices doubled, and the over-valued currency fell. Exports fell drastically.³ Money fled the country when the Bank of Finland deregulated interest rates and the movement of capital to encourage market efficiency. Unemployment reached an historic high, government deficits trebled. Taxes and interest rates increased steeply but services and wages were cut. Bankruptcies multiplied. Public debts trebled and the government introduced an austerity program together with a drastic re-structuring of the economy involving privatization, deregulation, and rationalization.

Normally a comparatively peaceful and stable polity (in spite of minority and caretaker coalitions and some difficulties with industrial relations), Finland entered into a period of exceptional political conflict and instability in the late 1980s and early 1990s. A radical Conservative-Social Democratic coalition government was elected in 1987: Harri Holkeri became the first Conservative Prime Minister since 1946; it was the first time the Conservatives had been in government for twenty years; and the first time the Centre Party had been out of power for more than a few months since April 1945. Holkeri's coalition pushed through a radical economic program causing open conflict with the Central Bank (its Director was sacked in 1992), a threatened general strike, and the resignation of one Cabinet minister—a rare event in Finland's consensus, coalition politics. Another Minister was forced to resign from Parliament for corruption - a shocking and unprecedented event.⁴

Finland's collapse of political support in the late 1980s and early 1990s was not caused by any decay of social capital, but a period of severe economic and political problems. However in the second half of the 1990s the country's 'new economy' had achieved a strong recovery, reaching a 5% growth rate in 1997. Political life settled back into its normal pattern, and the 1999 election was exceptionally dull, even by Finnish standards (Nurmi and Nurmi 2001). Confidence in public institutions (the armed forces, the education system, the police, the civil service), improved substantially, and confidence in Parliament increased from 34% to 44%, taking it up to the Swiss figure and not far behind Denmark (49%) and Sweden (51%). Satisfaction with democracy improved from 52% in 1995 to 57% in 2000. In 1995, 75% of Finns thought of democracy as the best form of government (rather low by world standards and equal to Belarus, Armenia, and the Ukraine), but by 2000 this had climbed to 91%, equal to the Swiss figure. The country had regained much (not all) of its political support by 2000.

A single case study proves nothing, but the Finnish case suggests that it might be a combination of *high* social capital and severe economic and political performance problems that caused political support to fall. Exceedingly well connected with voluntary and community life,

highly education and well informed politically (Norris, 2000), the Finns had been accustomed to one of the world's most effective and efficient economic and political systems. Perhaps it was the high level of social capital and political awareness combined with severe political and economic problems that caused the rapid loss of political support? In this case, one might also speculate that the high level of social capital and political awareness combined with economic and political recovery allowed political support to bounce back almost to its previous level.

Sweden

Whereas Finland suffered a sharp fall in political support, it declined more slowly in Sweden. Between 1970 and the 1990s there was a substantial fall in political trust, subjective and system competence, party identification, and confidence in parliament, the cabinet, and the major institutions of government (Holmberg 1999: 105; Listhaug and Wiberg 1996, 320; Holmberg and Weibull, undated; Dalton 1999: 66; Rothstein 2002: 293; Klingemann 1999: 47). As in Finland, support for the political community and democracy retained their strength; support for democracy as the best form of government remained solid and pride in the country and willingness to fight for it were high (Rothstein 2002: 294).

There is no evidence of a decline of social capital in Sweden in recent decades. Generalized social trust rose from 57% in 1981 to 67% in 1997, remaining at 66% in 2000. Informal social activity and the number of citizens who could be characterized as socially isolated and passive declined between 1968 and 1991, while participation in formally organised voluntary associations, the number of organisations, levels of activity, and group financial resources also increased (Rothstein 2002: 303, 319; Holmberg and Weibull, undated: 9; de Hart and Dekker 1999: 77). Sweden's voluntary sector in the mid 1990s was, if anything, stronger even than Finland's, which ranked among the foremost in the world (Siisiainen 1999: 133).

Two experts on Swedish politics agree on the same general explanation of falling political support. Holmberg (1999: 114-22) concludes that political factors are the most powerful, especially popular evaluation of government performance. 'In this sense', he writes (p. 122), 'political distrust is best explained by politics'. Rothstein (2002: 324-31) argues that the failure of the Swedish corporatist model of incremental wage bargaining produced increasing industrial conflict, a spiral of inflation, a series of currency devaluations, and a sharp decline in economic performance, dropping Sweden from fourth in the OECD wealth table in 1970 to eighteenth in 1997 (see also OECD 2002a), plus a long and unusually bitter struggle between unions and employers. The failure of the old corporatist system to produce compromise on labour laws and flexible systems of production caused the government to push through heavily criticised reforms. In short, both Holmberg and Rothstein agree that political developments caused the decline of political support.

As in Finland, the Swedish situation stabilized after 1995 when the economy revived (OECD 2002a: 98) and political life returned to greater normality. And, as in Finland, economic and political recovery coincided with a 'bounce back' of political support. Confidence in parliament increased from 47% to 51% between 1990 and 2000 (Inglehart et al., eds., 2004, Table E075) and satisfaction with democracy rose from 48% in 1996 to 65% in 2000 (Holmberg and Weibull, undated: 19). Support for democracy as the best form of government increased slightly from 93% in 1990 to 95% in 2000.

It is interesting to compare Finland and Sweden with Norway and Denmark: all four have maintained unusually high levels of social capital; unusual economic and political problems have

been accompanied by marked loss of political support in Finland and Sweden, followed by a bounce back when economic and political performance improved; Norway and Denmark show few signs of weakening political support (Klingemann 1999; Dalton 1999; Holmberg 1999) and neither have experienced exceptional political or economic problems in recent decades (OECD 2002b: 30; OECD 2005: 25; the annual Political Data sections of *The European Journal of Political Research*).

*New Zealand*⁵

Political support slumped heavily in New Zealand in the late 1980s and early 1990s. In 1991 it was the lowest since opinion polling started in the 1960s. Confidence in parliament declined so much that by the early 1990s it was at the same level as Argentina, Macedonia, Venezuela, Columbia, Brazil, and Peru. Official voting turnout figure declined, party membership and identification fell, contributions to party funds began to dry up, and increasing numbers felt that politicians were out of touch (Vowles 2004; Dalton 2004: 29-33).

Social capital remained high by world standards. Social trust in the 1990s was on a par with Finland, Ireland, Canada, The Netherlands, West Germany, and Iceland. Voluntary activity was also unusually high by world standards high, though there are some indications of a small decline between 1981 and 1999 (Donovan et al. 2004; Vowles 2004: 8, McVey and Vowles 2005; Curtis, Grabb and Baer 1992).

New Zealand has had long-term economic problems that produced severe political problems. Real GDP per capita fell from 138% of the OECD average in 1965 to 88% in the late 1990s (OECD 2004b: 23), when the country had one of the most sluggish, high debt, and inflationary economies in the OECD, setting the scene for reduced government spending. Unemployment increased and wages and working conditions worsened. Strident public opposition to a new value-added tax led to an incoming government reverting to an unpopular surtax on high pensions. Two successive governments ran into problems, including the creation of breakaway parties, the sacking of Cabinet Ministers, slumps in government popularity, and the loss of important by-elections.⁶

Against a background of severe economic and political problems, and widespread distrust and disillusion with politicians and parties, a referendum on the electoral system was held in 1992 that produced unusually strong support (85%) for constitutional reform. The initial effect of reform this was increased satisfaction with the democratic process to a high 75% (Karp and Bowler 2001: 59), but a mood of disillusionment reduced this rapidly to 45% soon after when the first coalition government of the new electoral system fell apart in 1998. The success of the second coalition government, plus one of the highest rates of economic growth in the OECD after 1999, coincided with increased support for the system (Karp and Bowler 2001: 59). Satisfaction with democracy (and other indicators of support) climbed from 45% in 1998 to 67% in 2002 (Vowles, et al. 2004: 174). As in Finland and Sweden, New Zealand seems to have solved at least some of its severe political and economic problems, and like them political support has bounced back.

Japan

Levels of political support in Japan have generally been low by OECD standards, but fell to near-record low levels in the early 1990s (Pharr 1997: 237-45, 2000: 174). Belief in democracy

as a form of government rose between 1968 and 1993 (Inoguchi 2002: 363-4, 373; Kobayashi, undated: Table 9-12), but trust in politicians fell sharply, as did satisfaction with democracy, support for parties, confidence in parliament and many other public institutions (Pharr 2000: 175; Kobayashi undated, Chapter 9, Section 3 (1); Dalton 2004; Newton and Norris 2000: 57; Inoguchi 2002: 377). Among ten Asian countries in 2003, Japan ranked at the very bottom of the table, and often by a wide margin, for confidence in central and local government, parliament, the army, and the legal, educational, and public health systems (Inoguchi, et al., eds 2005: 359-62).

There is little sign of an erosion of Japanese social capital in recent decades. The World Values surveys show social trust at a constant 42% in 1980, 1990, and 1995. Inoguchi's (2002: 363-4) composite indicator of civic activity also remained constant between 1981 and 1996, but the number of interest groups and voluntary associations multiplied dramatically (Pharr 2002: 184; Inoguchi 2002: 360-3). Japanese citizens attach more importance to involvement with clubs and hobby groups than the citizens of any other of the ten nations covered by the AsiaBarometer of 2003 (Inoguchi, Basanez, Tanaka, and Dadabaev 2005: 338). At the same time, there is little evidence that involvement with voluntary groups in Japan is associated with political trust or satisfaction with politics, and the multiplication of interest groups and voluntary associations in Japan, 1960-1990, seems to have done little to sustain trust in politicians, satisfaction with politics, or confidence in the political system (Pharr 2000: 188)

What explains the decline of political trust and confidence in Japan is not a decline of social capital but the performance of the political system and of the politicians who ran it. Corruption has been a particularly important issue in Japanese politics and elections (Reed 1991), and according to Pharr (2000: 199) 'officials' misconduct has been by far the single best predictor at any given point in time of citizen confidence in government over the past two decades'. Misconduct in this context refers not just to the headline hitting corruption scandals from Lockheed in 1976 to Recruit affair of 1989, but to the routine misuse of public money by politicians for private and party gain (Kobayashi, undated, Chapter 7, Section 5). Large numbers of Japanese believe that their politicians are corrupt and dishonest (Pharr 1997: 240), and one some studies link this to low levels of political trust and confidence, and to dissatisfaction with public policies (Dadabaev 2005: 35; Inoguchi, Basanez, Tanaka, and Dadabaev 2005: 367).

Neither economic performance nor social capital explains the loss of political support in Japan. Support fell as national wealth increased (Pharr 2000: 180) and social capital was highest among the best educated, managerial groups who showed the greatest loss of support (Kobayashi, undated, Table 9-27; Inoguchi 2002: 371-2). This combination of circumstances is consistent with the earlier tentative suggestion that a mixture of high or rising social capital and poor government performance may cause support to fall. Unlike Sweden, Finland, and New Zealand, however, political support has not improved in Japan, but then political performance has not improved either.

Discussion

We can draw two conclusions from this discussion with some degree of confidence. First, Figures 1 and 2 show a statistically significant and positive association between generalized social trust and various measures of political trust and democratic support across a wide range and large number of countries. Although they are simple correlations and not particularly strong ones, they are consistent with the results of most other cross-national comparative work on social

capital. Second, a decline of political support is not associated with a decline of social capital in the four cases studies. It is sufficient to discover one black swan disprove the claim that all swans are white, and in Sweden, Finland, New Zealand and Japan we have four black swans. It does not follow that there is never a link between social capital and political support, but in these four limiting cases there is virtually no evidence of such a link.

Great caution must be exercised in drawing further conclusions from this study, particularly since the case study evidence is inconsistent with the aggregate, cross-national evidence, and since there are only four case studies. Although these are carefully chosen as examples of substantial decline in political support in order to test social capital theory, we inevitably run into the problem of more variables than cases when we try to go beyond this task, and it would take many more cases and control groups to uncover the inter-relationships between three sets of variables.

However, the evidence, limited though it certainly is, suggests some interesting possibilities (see Table 1). The four case studies all show ample evidence of severe economic and political problems, suggesting that performance may have more to do with declining support than social capital. However, the temptation to throw away social capital theory because it is not confirmed by the case studies should be resisted, not least because the evidence presents a puzzle: the aggregate data is consistent with social capital theory, while the case study evidence is not. How can we resolve the theoretical dilemma presented by the inconsistency evidence? The following suggestions are suggested by the evidence presented here, but this is far from strong or conclusive given the limitations of both the aggregate cross-national analysis and the four case studies. What follows, therefore, takes the form of no more than cautious and tentative suggestions.

It may be difficult to build democracy in countries that do not have the necessary basis of social trust and co-operation, a well-founded civil and community life, and social institutions that work effectively and impartially. Low social trust is not normally associated with the sort of well-performing democracy that is likely to sustain high levels of political support. But social capital is not necessarily, automatically or invariably associated with high levels of political support. The cross-national correlations in Figures 1 and 2 are statistically significant and not trivial, but they are not substantively large either, and there are many exceptions to the general rule, not least the four examples of Finland, Sweden, New Zealand and Japan. High and sustained levels of social capital do not seem to prevent a decline of support where there are severe economic problems and/or an apparent failure of political performance. Social capital may be a necessary but not a sufficient basis for democratic government, and a necessary but not sufficient basis for high levels of support for the political system. In general, social capital may encourage effective democratic government, which may encourage positive attitudes towards the operation of the system of government, but the link may be broken by poor performance, among other possible intervening variables.

It may be—although the hypothesis is speculative—that the more social capital the proportionately greater the loss of support in times of severe political and economic trouble. This suggestion is consistent with other research showing that political support in the western world has declined most among educated and wealthy groups that have benefited most from rising affluence (Dalton 2004: 126; See also Bok 1997; Pharr 2000: 180; Kobayashi undated Table 27; Inoguchi 2002: 371-2). Conversely, high social capital countries like Finland, Sweden and New Zealand have managed to rebuild support rapidly when political and economic problems were resolved with some degree of success.

Table 1. Four Case Studies of Political Support, Social Capital, and Political and Economic Performance: Summary

Political Support	Social Capital	Economic and Political Performance
<u>Finland</u>		
Unusually high by world standards in 1981 Large and sharp decline in many indicators of political support early 1980s -1990. Recovery of political support to near 1981 levels by 2000	Unusually high by world standards 1981 – 2000	Unusually good by world standards until early 1980s. Severe economic and political problems early 1980s to early 1990s. Economic and political performance largely restored to normal levels in late 1990s.
<u>Sweden</u>		
Long, slow decline in many indicators of political support, 1960s to early 1990s. Partial recovery of political support in late 1990s.	Unusually high by world standard 1950s – 2000.	Economic and government problems caused by breakdown of Swedish model 1980s to 1990s. Economic and political performance improve and stabilize in late 1990s.
<u>New Zealand</u>		
Comparatively high by world standards until 1980s. Sharp decline in indicators of political support starting in late 1980s. Small revival of political support. Decline in political support again. Substantial revival of political support 1998–02.	Comparatively high by world standards 1980s - 2000.	Economic and political performance comparatively good until late 1980s. Sharp economic decline in late 1980s, followed by severe economic problems. Radical reforms of economy and constitution. Disappointment with constitutional reforms and first coalition government. Second coalition government a greater success.
<u>Japan</u>		
Low and declining levels of support from 1980s to 2000. No revival of support.	Low but increasing in 1980s and 1990s	Strong economic performance falls off in 1980s, and economic shocks in 1990s. Widespread concern with pervasive political corruption 1970s to 2000.

Source: Compiled by the author.

Social capital, political performance, and political support seem to be mutually inter-dependent and to form a single syndrome, but the cause and effect relations between them are not perfectly symmetrical, and the links are sometimes loose and contingent. If so, it is not enough to rely on either social capital or performance theories to explain decline in political support in western democracies. Both may be right, but only in part, and it may take both together to build a satisfactory explanation.

Lastly, the case studies may throw light on a broader range of theories of political crisis and loss of support for democracy. It is striking that all four countries experienced real problems of economic and political performance. If this is the case, then neither government overload, nor a crisis of legitimacy, nor the demands of new social movements, nor structural realignments caused by postmodern transformation, nor rising popular expectations of government seem to have caused the public to become more critical of their political leaders, institutions, and systems of government. Rather, real-world problems caused their citizens to revise their political opinions, and when these problems were (partially) solved in Finland, Sweden and New Zealand, the political mood became more positive and supportive. We cannot be sure, given the limitations of the study, but it is possible that strong social capital may have something to do with both the decline and revival of political support.

Endnotes

The author would like to thank the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin, where the original work for this article was complete in early 2005, and the Political Science Program of the Research School of the Social Sciences at the Australian National University, where the article was heavily rewritten later that year. Without their generous support the article would never have been written.

¹ For a recent summary and overview of the evidence see Dalton 2004.

² For an account of the Finnish economy in the 1980s and 1990s see Pesonen and Riihinen, 2002: 246-62.

³ Exports to the USSR were 13% of the national total in 1990, 5% in 1995 and 4% in 2000.

⁴ For details of economic and political events in Finland in the 1990s see Jan Sundberg's annual entry in the Political Data Yearbook of the *European Journal of Political Science*.

⁵ I am grateful to Professor Jack Vowles and an anonymous reviewer for suggesting important improvements to this section on New Zealand.

⁶ For details of these see Vowles 1992, 1994.

References

- Anderson and C. J. and C. A. Guillory (1997) Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems, *American Political Science Review*, 91: 66-81.
- Anderson, C. J. and A. J. LoTempio (2002) Winning, losing, and political trust in America, *British Journal of Political Science*, 32: 335-51.
- Anderson, C. J. and Y. V. Tverdova (2003) Corruption, political allegiances, and attitudes toward government in contemporary democracies, *American Journal of Political Science*, 47: 91-109.
- Baume M. A. and D. A. Lake (2003) The *Political* economy of growth: Democracy and human capital, *American Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 47, No. 2 : 333-47.
- Bengtsson, A. (2004) Economic voting: The effect of political context, volatility and turnout on voters' assignment of responsibility, *European Journal of Political Research*, 43: 749-67.
- Bok, D. (1997) Measuring the performance of government, in J. S. Nye, P.D. Zelikow, and D. C. King, eds., *Why People Don't Trust Government*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 55-75.
- Booth, J. A., and P.B Richard (2001) Civil society and political context in central America, in R. Edwards, M. W. Foley, and M. Diani, eds., *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*. Hanover, Tufts University Press: 43-55.
- Borre, O. (1995) Scope of government beliefs and political support, in O. Borre and RE. Scarborough, eds., *The Scope of Government*, Oxford, Oxford University Press: 343-66.
- Bowler S. and J. A. Karp (2004) Politicians, scandals, and trust in government, *Political Behaviour*, 26: 271-86.
- Clarke, H.D., N. Dutt, and A. Kornberg (1993) The political economy of attitudes towards polity and society in western European democracies, *Journal of Politics*, 55: 998-1021.
- Curtis, J. E. Grabb, and D. Baer (1992) Voluntary association membership in fifteen countries: A comparative analysis, *American Sociological Review*, 57: 139-152
- Cusack, T. R. (1999) The shaping of popular satisfaction with government and regime performance in Germany, *British Journal of Political Science*, 29: 641-72.
- Dadabaev, T. (2005) Japan: Family, values, and concerns in a modernized society, in Inoguchi, T., M. Basaez, A. Tanaka, and T. Dadabaev, eds, (2005) *Values and Life Styles in Urban Asia*. Tokyo, University of Tokyo Institute of Oriental Culture: 27-36.
- Dalton, R. J. (1999) Political support in advanced industrial democracies, in P. Norris, ed., *Critical Citizens*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 57-77.
- Dalton, R. J. (2004) *Democratic Challenges: Democratic Choice: The Erosion of Political Support in Advanced Industrial Democracies*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- de Hart J. and P. Dekker (1999) Civic engagement and volunteering in the Netherlands: A Putnamian analysis, in J. van Deth, M. Maraffi, K. Newton, and P. Whiteley, eds., *Social Capital and European Democracy*. London: Routledge: 75-107.
- Delhey, J., and K. Newton (2005) Predicting Cross-National Levels of Social Trust: Global Pattern or Nordic Exceptionalism? *European Sociological Review*, forthcoming.
- della Porta, D. (2000) Social capital, beliefs in government, and political corruption, in S. J. Pharr, and R. Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: Whats Troubling the Trilateral Countries?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press: 202-228.
- Donovan, T., S. Bowler, R. Hanneman, and J. A. Karp (2003) Social Groups, Sport and Political Engagement in New Zealand, *Australian Journal of Political Science*, 39: 405-19.
- Easton, D. (1975) A re-assessment of the concept of political support, *British Journal of Political Science* 5: 435-57.

- Evans, P. (1996) Government action, social capital and development: Reviewing the evidence on synergy, *World Development*, 24: 1119-32.
- Evans, G. and S. Whitefield (1995) The politics and economics of democratic commitment: Support for democracy in transition societies, *British Journal of Political Science*, 25: 485-514.
- Foley, M.W., R. Edwards R., and M. Diani (2001) Social capital reconsidered, in R. Edwards, M. W. Foley, and M. Diani, eds. (2001) *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective*. Hanover, N.H.: University of New England Press: 266-80.
- Finkel, S.E., E.N. Muller, and M. A. Seligson (1989) Economic crisis, incumbent performance, and regime support: A comparison of longitudinal data from West Germany and Costa Rica, *British Journal of Political Science*, 19: 329-51.
- Harmel R. and J. Robertson (1986) Government stability and regime support: a cross-national analysis, *Journal of Politics*, 48: 1029-40.
- Hetherington, M. C. (1998) The political relevance of political trust, *American Political Science Review* 92: 791-808.
- Holmberg, S. (1999) Down and down we go: Political trust in Sweden, in P. Norris, ed., *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 103-122..
- Holmberg. S., and L. Weibull (undated) *Swedish Trends*. Goteborg, SOM Institute, Goteborg University.
- Inglehart, R. (1999) Trust, well being and democracy, in M. E. Warren, ed., *Democracy and Trust*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 88-120.
- Inglehart, R., M. Basanez, J. Diez-Medrano, L. Halman, and R. Luijkx (2004) *Human beliefs and Values: A Cross Cultural Sourcebook Based on the 1999-2002 Values Surveys*, Delegacion Coyoacan, Mexico, Siglio Veintiuno Editores.
- Inoguchi, T. (2002) Broadening the basis of social capital in Japan, in Robert Putnam, ed., *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social capital in Contemporary Society*. New York: Oxford University Press: 359-92.
- Inoguchi, T., M. Basaez, A. Tanaka, and T. Dadabaev, eds, (2005) *Values and Life Styles in Urban Asia*. Tokyo, University of Tokyo Institute of Oriental Culture.
- Karp, J. A., and Bowler, S. (2001). Coalition politics and satisfaction with democracy: Explaining New Zealand's reaction to proportional representation, *European Journal of Political Research*, 40: 57-79.
- King, D. (1997) The polarisation of American parties and mistrust in government, in J. S. Nye, P.D. Zelikow, and D. C. King, eds., *Why people Don't Trust Government*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 155-78.
- Klingemann, H-D., (1999) Mapping political support in the 1990s: A global anlysis, in Pippa Norris, ed, *Critical Citizens: Global Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 31-56.
- Knack, S. (2002) Social capital and the quality of government, *American Journal of Political Science*, 46: 772-85.
- Knack, S. and P. Keefer (1997) Does social capital have an economic payoff? A cross-country investigation, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 1251-88.
- Kobayashi, Y. (undated) *Democratic Malfunction: Voters, Politicians and Parties in Japan, 1955-1993*, Keio University.
- Kornberg A., and H. D. Clarke (1992) *Citizens and Community: Political Support in a Representative Democracy*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Listhaug, O. (1995) The dynamics of trust in politicians, in H-D. Klingemann and D. Fuchs, eds., *Citizens and the State*. Oxford, Oxford University Press:261-297.

- Listhaug, O. and M. Wiberg, (1995) Confidence in political and private institutions, in H-D. Klingemann and D. Fuchs, eds., *Citizens and the State*. Oxford, Oxford University Press: 298-322.
- Levi, M. (1996) Social and unsocial capital: a review essay of Robert Putnam's Making Democracy Work, *Politics and Society*, 24: 45-55.
- Lockerbie, B. (1993) Economic dissatisfaction and political alienation in western Europe, *British Journal of Political Science*, 23: 281-93.
- McVey, A. and J. Vowles (2005) Virtuous circle or cul-de-sac? Social capital and political participation in New Zealand, *Political Science*, 57: 5-20.
- Miller, A. H. (1974) Political issues and trust in government, *American Political Science Review*, 68: 951-72.
- Miller, A. H. and O. Listhaug, (1990) Political parties and confidence in government: A comparison of Norway, Sweden and the United States, *British Journal of Political Science*, 29: 357-86.
- Miller, A. H. and O. Listhaug (1999) Political performance and institutional trust, in Pippa Norris, ed, *Critical Citizens: Global; Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 204-216.
- Mishler W. and R. Rose (1997) Trust, distrust and skepticism: Popular evaluations of civil and political institutions in post-communist societies, *The Journal of Politics*, 59: 418-51.
- Mishler W. and R. Rose (2001) What are the origins of political trust? Testing institutional and cultural theories in post-communist societies, *Comparative Political Studies*, 34: 30-62.
- Newton, K. (1999) Social and political trust in established democracies, in Pippa Norris, ed, *Critical Citizens: Global; Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 169-187.
- Newton, K. (2001) Trust, social capital, civil society, and democracy, *International Political Science Review*, 22 :201-14.
- Newton, K. and Norris, P. (2000) Confidence in public institutions: faith, culture, or performance?, in S. Pharr and R. Putnam, eds., *What's Troubling the Trilateral Democracies?* Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Norris, P. (1999) Institutions and political support, in P. Norris, ed. *Critical Citizens: Global; Support for Democratic Governance*. Oxford: Oxford University Press: 217-235.
- Norris, P. (2000) *A Virtuous Circle: Political Communications in Postindustrial Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Nurmi H, and L. Nurmi (2001) The 1999 parliamentary elections in Finland, *Electoral Studies*, 2: 127-9.
- OECD (2002a) *Economic Surveys:Sweden*. Paris, OECD
- OECD (2002b) *Economic Surveys 2004: Norway*. Paris, OECD
- OECD (2004a) *Economic Surveys 2004: Finland*. Paris, OECD
- OECD (2004b) *Economic Surveys: New Zealand*. Paris, OECD
- OECD (2005) *Economic Surveys 2004: Denmark*. Paris, OECD
- Paxton, P. (2002) Social capital and democracy: An inter-dependent relationship, *American Sociological Review*, 67: 254-77.
- Pharr, S. J. (1997) Public trust and democracy in Japan, in J. S. Nye, P. D. Zelikow, and D. C. King, eds., *Why Americans Mistrust Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 237-52.
- Pharr, S. (2000) Officials' misconduct and public distrust: Japan and the trilateral democracies, in S. J. Pharr and R. D. Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Democracies?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press: 173-201.
- Pharr S. J. and R. D. Putnam, eds., (2000) *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Democracies?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Persson, T. (2002) Do political institutions shape public policy?, *Econometrica*, 70: 883-905

- Pesonen, P. and O. Riihinen (2002) *Dynamic Finland: The Political System and the Welfare State*, Helsinki, Finnish Literature Society.
- Pharr, S. (1997), Public trust and democracy in Japan, in J. S. Nye, P. D. Zelikow, and D. C. King, eds., *Why People Don't Trust Government*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 237-52.
- Pharr, S. (2000) Officials' misconduct and public distrust: Japan and the trilateral democracies, in S. J. Pharr and R. D. Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Democracies?*, Princeton: Princeton University Press: 173-201.
- Putnam, R. (1993) *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Putnam, R. (2000) *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Putnam, R. D., S. Pharr, and R. J. Dalton (2000) Introduction: What's troubling the trilateral democracies?, in S. J. Pharr and R. D. Putnam, eds., *Disaffected Democracies: What's Troubling the Trilateral Democracies?*. Princeton: Princeton University Press: 3-27.
- Rahn, W. M., J. Brehm, and N. Carlson (1999) National elections as institutions for generating social capital, in T. Skocpol and M.P. Fiorina, eds., *Civic Engagement and American Democracy*, Washington, Brookings Institute: 111-160.
- Reed, S.R. (1991) Japan's 1990 general election: explaining the historical socialist victory, *Electoral Studies*, 10: 244-55.
- Rohrshneider, R. (2002) The democracy deficit and mass support for an EU-wide government, *American Journal of Political Science*, 46: 463-75.
- Rose, R. (2001) When government fails: Social capital in an antimodern Russia, in B. Edwards, M. W. Foley and Mario Diani, eds., *Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and Social Capital in Comparative Perspective*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England: 56-69.
- Rose, R. R., W. Mishler, and C. Haerpfer (1998) *Democracy and its Alternatives: Understanding Post-Communist Societies*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Rothstein, B. (2000) Trust, social dilemmas, and collective memories, *Journal of Theoretical Politics*, 12: 476-501.
- Rothstein, B. (2002), Sweden. Social capital in the social democratic state, in Robert Putnam, ed., *Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social capital in Contemporary Society*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 289-331.
- Rudolph, T.J. (2003) Whose responsible the economy? The formation and consequences of responsibility attributions, *American Journal of Political Science*, 46: 698-713.
- Schneider, M., P. Teske, M. Marschall, M. Mintrom, and C. Roch (1997) Institutional arrangements and the creation of social capital: The effects of public school choice, *American Political Science Review*, 91: 82-92.
- Scholz, J.T. (1998) Trust, taxes and compliance, in V. Braithwaite and M. Levi, eds., *Trust and Governance*, New York, Russell Sage: 135-66.
- Seligson, M. A. (2002) The impact of corruption on regime legitimacy: A comparative study of four Latin American countries, *Journal of Politics*, 64: 408-33.
- Siisiäinen, M. (1999) Voluntary associations and social capital in Finland, in Jan van Deth, et al., eds., *Social Capital and European Democracy*. London: Routledge: 120-43.
- Smith, G. G. Stoker, and W. Maloney (2004) Building social capital in city politics: Scope and limitations at the inter-organisational level, *Political Studies*, 52: 508-30.
- Sztompka P. (2000) *Trust: A Sociological Theory*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Tarrow, S. (1996). Making social science work across space and time: a critical reflection on Robert Putnam's *Making democracy Work*, *American Political Science Review*, 90: 389-97.
- Tyler, T. (1998) Trust and democratic governance, in Braithwaite, V. and M. Levi, eds. *Trust and Governance*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation: 269-94.

- Uslaner, E. M. (2002) *The Moral Foundations of Trust*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Van der Meer, J. (2003) Rain or fog? An empirical examination of social capital's rainmaker effects, in M. Hooghe and D. Stolle, eds., *Social Capital: Civil Society and Institutions in Comparative Perspective*, Basingtoke, Palgrave: 133-51
- Vowles, J. (1992) New Zealand, *European Journal of Political Research*, 22: 479-84.
- Vowles, J. (1994) New Zealand, *European Journal of Political Research*,. 24: 505-13.
- Vowles, J. (2004) Civic engagement in New Zealand: Decline or demise?, unpublished paper, University of Auckland.
- Vowles, J., P. Aimer, J. Karp, S. Banducci, and R. Miller, eds. (2004) *Voters' Veto: The 2002 Election in New Zealand and the Consolidation of Minority Government*. Auckland, Auckland University Press.
- Weatherford M. S. (1992) Measuring political legitimacy, *American Political Science Review*, 86: 149-66.
- Weil, F. (1989) The sources and structure of legitimation in western democracies: a consolidated model tested with time-series data in six countries since World war II, *American Sociological Review*, 54: 682-706.
- Welch, S., and J. R. Hibbing (1997) The effects of charges of corruption on voting behaviour in congressional elections, 1982-1990, *The Journal of Politics*, 59: 226-39.
- Woolcock, M. (1998) Social capital and economic development: Toward a theoretical synthesis and policy framework, *Theory and Society*, 27: 151-208.
- Zmerli, S, K. Newton, and J. R. Montero (forthcoming) Trust in people, confidence in political institutions, and satisfaction with democracy.