

CENTRAL NEW JERSEY REGIONAL SOCIAL CAPITAL BENCHMARK SURVEY

Study Sponsors:

Princeton Area Community Foundation

and

Princeton Regional Chamber of Commerce Foundation

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*Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey, Saguaro Seminar:
Civic Engagement in America Project, John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University*

**870 telephone interviews of residents of the central New Jersey region
(Mercer County and adjacent parts of Somerset and Middlesex Counties)**

Margin of Error = +/- **3.3%**
(at the 95% confidence level and 50/50 margins)

Weighted to age and sex (weighted $N=870$)

Fielded May 1 through June 8, 2007

FINAL PROJECT REPORT DECEMBER 2007

I. Introduction and Background

Nature and Purpose of Final Project Report

This report is the capstone of the Central New Jersey Regional Social Capital Benchmark Survey. As such, it incorporates by reference and assumes knowledge of these previously delivered reports:

- Survey Methodology Report: 41 pages, delivered December 28, 2007;
- Discussion and Presentation of Social Capital Indices: 10 pages, delivered November 20, 2007;

- Social Capital Indices Profile Tables by Demography, SES, and other relevant categories: 24 pages; delivered October 24, 2007;
- Per-Variable Profile Tables by Demography, SES, and other relevant categories: 273 pages; delivered October 26, 2007; and,
- Topline Report of Findings: 47 pages (with companion preliminary 3 page Data Weighting Report); delivered August 3, 2007.

The purpose of this report, then, is to reflect on the administration of the survey, to discuss opportunities and constraints vis-à-vis the dissemination of the survey findings, and to provide a narrative overview of the empirical findings. Hopefully, this and the preceding set of reports will provide useful guidance in planning for the targeting and distribution of grants and contracts for the purpose of facilitating sustainable and robust secular increases in social capital over the greater Mercer County area.

Comparisons to Other Similarly Situated Social Capital Surveys

The practical impetus for this effort is the Social Capital Benchmark Survey designed by the Saguaro Seminar: Civic Engagement in America, a project of the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University.¹ That project leads the contemporary research on “social capital,” which Harvard professor Robert D. Putnam succinctly defines as “social networks and the associated norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness.”² From a different perspective, Frances Fukuyama (writing one year before the publication of Putnam’s widely known *Bowling Alone* (2000)) separated the manifestations (what we call the indicators) of social capital from its core concept and defined it as:

an ... informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals. The norms... can range from ... reciprocity between two friends, all the way up to complex and elaborately articulated doctrines like Christianity or Confucianism. * * * [To constitute true social capital norms] they must lead to cooperation in groups and therefore are related to traditional virtues like honesty, the keeping of commitments, reliable performance of duties, reciprocity, and the like.³

Putnam’s initial motivation for writing *Bowling Alone* (2000) stemmed from the observation that over the last generation “our civic ties have weakened... and the price we pay for these frayed ties [is] in the quality of our education, our physical health and happiness, the safety on our streets, the responsiveness of democratic institutions of government, and in economic development.”⁴ To view this from the perspective of opportunity, the natural converse of low

¹ See <http://www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey/results7.html>.

² Putnam, Robert D. (2007). “*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century – The 2006 Johan Skytte Prize Lecture.*” *Scandinavian Political Studies*, Vol. 30(2), pp. 137-174, at 137.

³ <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/seminar/1999/reforms/fukuyama.htm#I>.

⁴ See http://www.cfsv.org/communitysurvey/docs/exec_summ.pdf. For additional detail on the 2000 administration, see Putnam, 2007 at 144-146. A relatively large trailing literature, at times supportive and at times critical, has developed as the progeny of *Bowling Alone*. These works are not reviewed here.

levels of social capital – high levels of social capital – underscores why social capital matters, i.e., because “much evidence suggests that where levels of social capital are higher, children grow up healthier, safer and better educated, people live longer, happier lives, and democracy and the economy work better.”⁵

As discussed in the Survey Methodology Report, the initial fielding of the Saguaro Seminar survey – the “2000 administration” – involved “a national sample of 3,000 respondents and representative samples in 40 communities nationwide (across 29 states) covering an additional 26,200 respondents.”⁶ The survey was administered again – the “2006 administration” – in two waves, the first from mid-January to late-April and the second from May to August, 2006. For this later administration, approximately 12,100 respondents were interviewed, of which approximately 2,750 were situated within the context of the national survey and 9,350 were spread across 14 regional surveys (comprised of 22 local subsamples).⁷

Cross-sectional survey findings are more useful when they can be compared to other similarly situated cross-sectional analyses and, typically, most useful when they can also be concatenated into a time-series analysis. While this latter longitudinal approach best describes the overall Harvard effort, there are some methodological complications in simply drawing comparisons between our data and the Harvard group’s data.

Comparisons to the 2000 Data

There is a strong theoretical basis on which to argue that data from 2000 – whether collected as part of the national survey or as part of the regional-local administrations – are not sound for the purposes of drawing comparisons to our data. In sum and substance, all of those data were collected before George W. Bush was elected twice, before the horrific events of September 11, 2001, before the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and before Hurricane Katrina and its administrative aftermath. To be more specific, these events include the resolution of a contested presidential election by the Supreme Court, an extensively and broadly lethal coordinated military-style attack on United States soil, and what can only fairly be described as an epic failure in emergency response to a predicted catastrophic weather event. These cannot be considered part of the “ordinary course” of “steady state” history. Thus, given the dramatic changes in the political, cultural, and social environments (as well as the mere passage of seven years), it is virtually impossible to achieve a theoretically defensible comparison of the 2000 Harvard group national (or regional) data to the 2007 Central New Jersey regional data. To be sure, the 2000 data are quite useful for making comparisons to the 2006 national and regional-local samples to assess the effect of these dramatic changes on social capital levels for those survey populations. However, the larger point is that we cannot compare our 2007 findings to any of the 2000 findings.

⁵ Putnam, 2007 at 138.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ See <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/2006sccs.htm>.

Comparisons to the 2006 Data

Unfortunately, comparisons to the 2006 Harvard effort data are also limited. At least as of this writing, the Harvard group has not yet released the national level social capital indices, nor the underlying micro data from which those indices could be generated.⁸ Thus we unfortunately cannot now compare our social capital indices values to the 2006 national sample values. The Harvard group has, however, released a combined weighted marginals profile report for the national 2006 data,⁹ and we can therefore – at the very least – make some useful comparisons between our point estimates of individual variables and the corresponding 2006 national point estimates.

There are, as of this writing, six reports of various depth, insight, and quality, which have been released by the regional-local participating partners.¹⁰ These are:

- *2006 Social Capital Benchmark Survey – Duluth-Superior Results* (Duluth Superior Area Community) [3/14/07];
- *Trends in Greensboro’s Social Capital: Preliminary Findings from the 2006 National Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey* (Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro, Community Dialogue) [and concomitant top line results release, 3/15/07];
- *What Makes New Hampshire Special? The Real New Hampshire Advantage: 2006 Social Capital Benchmark Survey* (A Project of the New Hampshire Charitable Foundation) [and concomitant press release, 3/29/07];
- *Kalamazoo Community Foundation 2006 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey Results* (Better Together Kalamazoo) [and concomitant press release, 12/29/07];
- *2006 Social Capital Survey* (Rochester Area Community Foundation); [and concomitant press release, undated]; and
- *2006 National Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey – Forsyth County Results* (The Winston-Salem Foundation) [undated].

To be sure, while these reports are useful as exemplars for our next-stage efforts at dissemination, there are much less useful in terms of our capacity to draw comparisons between our survey data findings and the six reported 2006 local and regional survey administrations.

⁸ See entry for “Data” indicating that “When these data are publicly available, we will post a notice here” <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/2006sccs.htm>.

⁹ See <http://www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro/pdfs/2006SCCSbanner.pdf>.

¹⁰ What is interesting about the titles of these reports is that they all – with the exception of Rochester – conflate the benchmark survey with subsequent time-series data collection efforts anchored to the benchmark data. In other words, while the titles of all but one of these reports refers to a “benchmark” survey, in fact none of them are “benchmark” surveys, but rather readministrations of the survey questionnaire to allow longitudinal comparisons to these region’s true benchmark surveys, completed in 2000.

This is because each of these reports largely (and properly) focused on substantive longitudinal changes in their relevant survey catchment areas. This is surely highly useful for those regional-local efforts, but with the underlying microdata unavailable, this limitation in those narratives (and, for the most part, those PowerPoint¹¹ presentations of findings) truncates our capacity to effectively assess the comparative parameters of the populations (and the degree to which the sample statistics accurately estimate those population parameters). Simply put, we don't have all of those regional-local administrations' data; we only have what they've made available in the context of their longitudinal analyses. Moreover, while some comparison to similarly situated data is inevitably useful, the scope of this project did not include extended penetrating cross-sample analyses, which would have increased the resource demands of this project. As a result, we are unable – without resort to exogenous data – to know whether we are comparing, so to speak, apples to apples, apples to oranges, or apples to railroad ties, and this greatly limits our capacity to draw comparisons useful for our purposes.¹²

This, though, calls the question of what we can use for valid comparisons. As referenced above, we can use the 2006 national data for comparing point estimates on individual variables; in addition, as discussed with the Foundation project team, in 2006, BCSR directed a similar social capital community benchmark survey for a cross-section of Staten Island, New York (effectively Richmond County, New York). Because of the availability of the microdata for that survey administration, we are able to use those findings as comparisons, as well.

II. About the Sample: To Whom Did We Talk?

About the Sample: Geography

One of the key concerns in the survey protocol development stage of this project was the proper delimitation of the sample catchment area. In order to better address intentions and constituencies of the two sponsoring Foundations, the survey was titled the “Central New Jersey Regional Social Capital Benchmark Survey,” with the sample geographic coverage area covering the following territory:¹³

¹¹ For an exceptionally important analysis of and advisory on the “dumbing down” effect of PowerPoint presentations, see Edward Tufte's scathing critique, “The Cognitive Style of Powerpoint: Pitching Out Corrupts Within, 2e,” (<http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/powerpoint>).

¹² One illustration underscores the importance of these kinds of comparisons. The sample for the 2006 Duluth-Superior regional administration of the survey, which collected only 495 completed interviews, included only 21 usefully categorizable minority respondents (10 African-Americans, 7 Asians, and 4 Hispanics). An additional complication is that some of the analysis is too simplistic to be useful; for e.g., the Rochester group purports to measure attitudes about inter-racial marriage on the strength of the answer to a single attitudinal question about the marriage of a close friend to a person of another race. This simplistic linkage ignores vital distinctions between the personal and the political; that a person may, indeed, approve of a particular instance of inter-racial marriage does not necessarily translate to a policy attitude about the desirability of inter-racial marriage as a socio-cultural phenomenon. An extended example of this is that most people will report that while they despise Congress, per se, they have a strong affinity for their own district's representative to Congress

¹³ The outline of the sample geographic coverage is shown as Figure M.1 on page 4 of the Survey Methods Report.

- Mercer County;
- Middlesex County municipalities: Cranbury Township, Plainsboro Township, and South Brunswick Township; and,
- Somerset County municipalities: Montgomery Township (which, by default, included the neighborhoods of Belle Mead and Skillman), Rocky Hill Borough, and the part of Franklin Township known as Kingston (bounded by the outer limit of 609 area code coverage within Franklin Township).

There was discussion among the Foundations' survey team about whether to analyze the sample in two components, Mercer County only ($n=707$, overall margin of error $\pm 3.7\%$) or the entire sample ($n=870$, overall margin of error $\pm 3.3\%$). For this reason, a preliminary top-line report of findings presented two separate one-way frequency tables for each variable; each set of tables was separately weighted to age-by-sex for the relevant population. In other words, the Mercer County only subsample was weighted to Census-derived population targets for Mercer County only, while the population targets for the whole sample covered the entire sample geographic region. Thus, the threshold question for analyzing, presenting, and disseminating the findings from this survey is whether to focus on the entire sample per se, or whether to carve out the Mercer County subsample.

To start, the key question is whether the non-Mercer County areas (i.e., the included adjacent sections of Middlesex and Somerset Counties) are theoretically indicated as part of the sample, i.e., is there some theoretical basis to believe that those populations are sufficiently similar to the Mercer County population that those areas are properly included as part of a sample that seeks to empirically assess social capital in the Mercer County region? To get at this empirically, we ask whether the residents of those adjacent regions identify with, or are in some way anchored to, Mercer County in a way that would inform social capital analyses. Indeed, there *is* good reason to believe that these areas particularly identify with and are socially as well as economically anchored to Mercer County. Evidence supporting that conclusion is that all of the major employers in Mercer County (Merrill Lynch, Bristol-Myers Squibb, Princeton University, ETS, and the four major hospitals) as well as smaller businesses, report that they draw significant numbers of their employees from towns in the bordering counties. Similarly, the major regional cultural institutions also pull patrons from outside the county to their offerings on a regular basis.¹⁴

It seems, then, there is a justifiable theoretical basis for analyzing the respondent pool as taken as the appropriate sample for a Mercer-County-based "Central New Jersey Regional" study. This conclusion, however, calls the questions of whether this matters empirically. In other words, it is useful to understand the effect of including these areas.

¹⁴ Employment references and cultural institutional catchment area information provided by the Princeton Area Community Foundation.

Of our 870 completed interviews, 81.3% (707) were from Mercer County, with 13.2% (115) and 5.5% (48) from Middlesex and Somerset Counties respectively.¹⁵ After weighting, there was no statistical difference between a Mercer-County-only sample and the full sample on point estimates for sex, and other differences, while predictable, fell substantially within the survey's margin of error. Moreover, these differences comport with common knowledge about the demographic composition of the adjacent areas. By way of overview, including the adjacent Somerset County and Middlesex County areas generated the following differences from the Mercer-only sample:

- reduced the percent of non-Hispanic blacks (by 1.7%);
- reduced the percent of Hispanics (by 1.2%);
- reduced percentages of the “50 and older” group (by 1.5%) and the “18 to 29” group (by 0.9%) but increased the “30 to 49” group (by 3.9%);
- decreased the percent of native born Americans (by 2.3%);
- increased the percent of Asians (by 2.8%);
- increased the percent with a bachelor's degree or higher (by 4.3%); and,
- increased the percent with a 2006 household income over \$75,000 (by 3.9%).

The sample, then, was slightly whiter, slightly more likely to be born in the United States, slightly-more middle-aged, slightly more educated, and slightly more wealthy. These slight demographic differences, though, did not pan out in any particularly meaningful differences on the substantive inquiries. For example, for the five initial questions probing how important various characteristics¹⁶ are to the respondents' sense of self, the mean absolute difference on the “very important” answer value that resulted from including the adjacent areas was 0.7%. Since the mean score at the full sample level for that answer value for those five questions was 52.5% on consideration of the full sample count of 870, the overall margin of error is applicable. The deviation on these questions, then, that resulted from including the adjacent areas approximated 21% of the spread of the margin of error. In other words, because the deviation was well securely within the margin of error at approximately the 50% point on the full sample, we can infer – with 95% confidence – that including the adjacent areas does not unduly bias the social capital findings. Similarly, for the eleven questions probing social trust, the mean deviation occasioned as the result of including the adjacent regions was 0.85%, again well within the survey's overall margin of error. For a final example, on the issue of whether the respondent has a “personal friend who is gay or lesbian,” despite that the Mercer-only sample had 325 affirmative responses and the full sample had 402, the percent-of-valid sample point estimates were exactly identical at 47.8%. We see, then, that even on the sensitive, and generally highly variable, issue of individualized affinity for gays or lesbians, there is a sample-wide coherence that supports the claim that the sample is theoretically properly delimited.

¹⁵ These distributions are unweighted. Unless noted, all distributions and point estimates refer to weighted data.

¹⁶ These characteristics are: occupation, place of residence, ethnic/racial background, religion, and “being an American.”

Thus, despite the trivial but non-zero demographic changes that result from including the adjacent areas, this investigatory empirical analysis¹⁷ supports the theoretical assertion that the sample area, defined as Mercer County with adjacent sections of Middlesex and Somerset County, constituted a coherent analytic unit for social capital study purposes.

About the Sample: Demography, Socio-Economic Status, and Other Characteristics

There are many “first” questions about a complex survey such as this one; the “first” “first” question, however, is simple – “to whom did we speak?” Geographically, we spoke to 870 residents (81.3% hailing from Mercer County ($n=707$), 13.2% from Middlesex County ($n=115$), and 5.5% from Somerset County ($n=48$)).¹⁸ Demographically, as is the country, the sample was relatively evenly split in terms of sex with a slight preponderance of women (48% to 52%). Twenty-one percent of the sample was in the 18-29 age group, with 44% at 30 to 49 years only, and 35% aged 50 and older. Non-Hispanic whites constituted 64.2% of the sample ($n=558$), with non-Hispanic blacks, Hispanics, and Asians, respectively, making up 15.1% ($n=132$), 10.5% ($n=91$), and 7.6% ($n=66$) of the sample. Eighty percent ($n=686$) were born in the United States; of those who weren’t, 62.% had come to the United States over a decade ago. Fifty of the 870 interviews (5.7%) were conducted in Spanish.

In terms of household demography, 58% of the sample was married ($n=501$), and another 6.6% ($n=57$) were either in civil unions, domestic partnerships, or “committed living relationships.”¹⁹ On the less-happy side of living arrangements, 1.8% of the sample was separated ($n=15$), 6.6% were divorced ($n=57$), and 5.3% were widowed ($n=46$). Interestingly, almost 21.5% of the sample ($n=184$) reported “never married.” About 17% percent of the sample lived alone ($n=149$), and over 57% ($n=496$) lived with one other adult in the household. Just under half of the sample, 49.8% ($n=429$) lived in childless households and another 41.3% had one or two

¹⁷ I call this an “investigatory” analysis because comparing these regions is not part of the scope of the project. In fact, had we wished to specifically compare these adjacent areas with Mercer County per se, we would have oversampled the Somerset and Middlesex County areas similar to the way the New Hampshire group did with the I-93 corridor and Cheshire County (*see* New Hampshire report, at p. 4). Similarly, despite its broad sociological implications, social capital is a largely local phenomenon; for this reason, the project scope did not include resources for analyzing population differences between our geographic coverage area and other similarly situated regional-local administrations, or even comparing population differences between our study area and New Jersey as a whole. We did, however, compare the deviations between our sample, unweighted and weighted, and its source geographic coverage area. These critical analyses are found in the Survey Methods Report at pages 10 through 13. In short, after weighting, absolute deviations from the weighted sample to the population in the six-cell sex-by-age matrix ranged from 0.18% to 0.71%, and the absolute deviations on the race-ethnicity distribution ranged from 0.1% to 1.8%. These acceptable deviations assure, that at least on the dimensions of age, sex, and race-ethnicity, the sample substantially approximates the population from which it was drawn.

¹⁸ For distributions within the counties, *see* the top line report at pp. 43-44.

¹⁹ While it is impossible to tease out a high-range estimate for sample incidence of gays and lesbians, we can reasonably tease out the low-range estimate on the basis that – despite that the informing statutes allow certain heterosexual couplings to register as such – it is likely that only gays or lesbians would report “civil union” or “domestic partnership” as their living arrangement. The low-range estimate, then asserts that at a minimum 1.7% of the sample was gay or lesbian; the high-range estimate – if all of the responders to “committed living relationship” were gay or lesbian – could be as high as 6.6%.

children (aged 17 or younger) in the household. Of those who had children, about 12% ($n=50$) had children three years old or younger.

The next useful sample dimension is socioeconomic status. Over half the sample ($n=490$) had a bachelor's degree or higher, while just under 21% ($n=180$) had a high school diploma or less. Similarly, 53.5% ($n=401$) had 2006 household income that exceeded \$75,000, with two-thirds of that group ($n=269$) having household incomes in excess of \$100,000. Just under 70% ($n=604$) were working, almost 13% ($n=112$) were retired, and only 6.6% ($n=57$) were homemakers, 4.4% ($n=38$) were students, 3.5% ($n=30$) were unemployed, and 1.6% ($n=14$) were permanently disabled. However, on a follow-up question, of those who reported being "retired," "homemaker," or a "student," over 15% ($n=32$) also reported that they were "doing any work for pay at the present time." Thirty-eight percent ($n=240$) of the sample reported working "31 through 40" hours per week, with slightly over 41.1% ($n=260$) reporting working 41 hours per week or more. Only 8.7% of the sample ($n=55$) reported commuting more than an hour to work, with slightly over 40% ($n=243$) commuting less than 15 minutes. Just under half the commuting sample ($n=301$), however, spent between 30 to 60 minutes daily commuting to work.

Turning to politics and religion, over 65% of the sample ($n=568$) were either "very" or "somewhat" interested in public affairs, with one-third ($n=278$) reporting either "very" or "moderately" conservative and 37.5% ($n=333$) reporting either "very" or "moderately" liberal. These distributions, however, did not map as expected onto political party affiliation, where just under 21% ($n=153$) reported Republican affiliation and 45.7% ($n=335$) reporting Democratic affiliation, with the remaining one-third of valid sample reporting independence from political parties. At slightly over 70% ($n=605$), the sample was predominantly Christian, with over half of that group Catholic ($n=318$). Slightly over 6% of the sample ($n=53$) was Jewish, while over 14% ($n=123$) reported no religious affiliation. Of those who reported a religious affiliation, slightly over 65% ($n=481$) reported being a member of a religious congregation, over 31% ($n=231$) reported attending religious services at least weekly, and slightly over 40% ($n=298$) reported taking part in an activity at their religious congregation over the past 12 months.

Looking at individual-community relations, we see that 52.2% of the sample ($n=454$) had lived in their community for more than a decade and almost 79% of the sample ($n=679$) owned their own home. Over 85% of the sample ($n=742$) reported they felt their community was an either "excellent" or "good" place to live, and almost 79% of the sample ($n=676$) believed "people like [them]" could have a "moderate" or "big" impact in making their community "a better place to live."

Moving to self-assessments, we learned that on a scale from 1 (extremely dissatisfied) to 10 (extremely satisfied) 71.5% ($n=620$) rated their overall life satisfaction at 8 or higher; in fact, 97.4% of the sample ($n=845$) rated that variable at 5 or higher. Two thirds of the sample (66.3%, $n=577$) rated the overall state of their health at either "excellent" or "very good," while over three-quarters of the sample (75.5%, $n=639$) believed it "somewhat" or "very" unlikely they'd be the victim of a crime in the next 12 months, compared to just under 22% ($n=185$) who thought that unfortunate event "very" or "somewhat" likely. Over a quarter of the sample (27.6%, $n=239$) were "very" satisfied with their "present financial situation," well over half (58.6%,

$n=507$) were “somewhat” satisfied and just under 14% ($n=119$) were “not at all” financially satisfied. Sadly, over 4% ($n=36$) of the sample reported “no close friends,” while 57.2% ($n=494$) reported between one and five close friends. In one of the more curious socio-psychological findings, 13.6% ($n=118$) of the sample indicated they had “more than 10 close friends,” with whom they “feel at ease...can talk to about private matters, or call on for help.”

Lastly, it’s interesting to know how “plugged-in” our sample is. About 23% ($n=204$) did not read any newspapers in the past week, while 40% ($n=347$) read one every day. The data on television viewing, unfortunately, is corrupt,²⁰ but we know that almost 22% of the sample ($n=189$) never uses the internet, for email or otherwise, while almost 43% of the sample ($n=369$) uses the internet more than six hours per week, with almost half of that group ($n=175$) using the internet more than 11 hours per week.

III. Social Capital Measures: Empirical Findings

There are a number of ways to unpack the story these data have to tell about social capital in the Central New Jersey region. This section presents an individual-variable analysis with the essential message that “while we have good levels of social capital, they can be better.” In social science terms, the key finding is that in a region where aggregate levels of education and income are significantly and substantially higher than the national average, we would expect to find higher than national average levels of social capital indicators. We base this on the widely accepted effects of education and income. To the former, Putnam instructively summarizes the condition (“education boosts civic engagement sharply, and education levels have risen massively”) and unpacks its predictable effects:

Education is one of the most important predictors – usually, in fact, *the* most important predictor – of many forms of social participation – from voting to associational membership, to chairing a local committee, to hosting a dinner party, to giving blood. To be sure, education has little effect on *schmoozing* – that is informal social connectedness, like visiting friends or family dining – or on church attendance, although education *is* positively correlated with membership in church-related groups. On the other hand, education is an especially powerful predictor of participation in public, formally organized activities. Having four additional years of education (say, going to college) is associated with 30 percent more interest in politics, 40 percent more club attendance, and 45 percent more volunteering. College graduates are more than twice as likely to serve as an officer or committee member of a local organization, to attend a public meeting, to write Congress, or to attend a political rally. The same basic pattern applies to both men and women and to all races and generations. Education, in short, is an extremely powerful predictor of civic engagement.

Why does education have such a massive effect on social connectedness? Education is in part a proxy for privilege – for social class and economic advantage – but when income, social status, and education are

²⁰ There is apparently a defect in the question about television viewing that renders its answer values suspect. While the question probes “hours per day” on an “average weekday,” because the analysis period – the “average weekday” – was described as “Monday through Friday,” it appears that some respondents provided answers for a week-long, rather than a day-long, period. To illustrate, 16.4% ($n=143$) admitted to watching more than 20 hours of television over the relevant period. It is unlikely that over 16% of the sample spent more than 20 hours in a 24 day watching television. While further analysis may determine otherwise, at this writing it appears that unfortunately this question has to be discarded.

used together to predict various forms of civic engagement, education stands out as the primary influence. * * * [W]hether across individuals or across states and localities (during the first two-thirds of the twentieth century) across time, more education means more participation.²¹

To the latter issue – income and wealth – Putnam is also instructive:

[F]inancial worries and economic troubles have a profoundly depressing effect on social involvement, both formal and informal. * * * Financial anxiety is associated...with less time spent with friends, less card playing, less home entertaining, less frequent attendance at church, less volunteering, and less interest in politics. Even social activities with little or no financial cost are inhibited by financial distress. [It is important to note, however, that] it is not low income per se, but the financial worry that it engenders, that inhibits social engagement. Even among the well-to-do, a sense of financial vulnerability dampens community involvement.²²

In our case, 51% of the sample had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 28% for the Harvard national 2006 sample. Similarly, 54% of our sample had 2006 household income in excess of \$75,000 compared to 27% for the national sample (2005 household amounts); the measures for households with income in excess of \$100,000 are 36% for our sample compared to 15% at the national level. This, then, presents the key puzzle of this research: If our educational and income levels are significantly and substantially higher than the national average, why aren't our indicators of social capital-based activities higher?

By and large, quantitative general population surveys are blunt instruments of investigation; they can tell us a great deal descriptively, and can generally inform inferential analysis, but are constrained in unpacking causal mechanisms such as the one at the core of the puzzle raised above. For that, qualitative data collection methods such as focus groups or in-depth interviewing are more useful. For now, though, we can extract some useful insights to guide our thinking.

Investment in Community and a Sense of Empowerment

Many people have deep roots in the community, which implies they are invested (Q12). More than half (52.2%) have lived in community more than ten years (with 33.1% of those more than 20 years) and nearly a quarter (22%) have lived in community six to ten years. Most of our respondents are well connected with immediate neighbors (i.e., the 10 or 20 households that live closest), a value that is higher than the national point estimate (Q51). More than half (55.9%) talk to or visit with immediate neighbors just about everyday or several times a week, while at the national level, less than half (48%) do. A vast majority feel they can have an impact in making community a better place to live, which implies a sense of empowerment (Q16). 95.7% think they can have an impact (big, moderate or small) with 33.1% thinking they can have big impact and 45.6% thinking they can have moderate impact.

²¹ Putnam, Robert D. (2000). *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster), pp. 187, 186.

²² *Id.*, at 192-193.

Diversity

Race and religion (sometimes considered the great dividers) are not as important to respondents' sense of who they are as are other factors. More specifically, religion and ethnic or racial background were listed last on the dimension characteristics important to one's sense of self (for the answer value "very important," 70.4% ranked "being an American," 57.6% ranked "occupation," 49.1% ranked "place of residence," 48.2% ranked "religion," and only 37.2% ranked "ethnic or racial background" (Q5a1-Q5a5)). Overall, we have notably greater diversity in our personal friendships along ethnic, racial and religious lines when compared to the national sample (Q55E-I). For our sample, 83% has a personal friend who has a different religion, compared to 78% of the national sample; similarly, 60.5% has a personal friend who is Latino or Hispanic, compared to 58% at the national level; 50.6% has a personal friend who is Asian, compared to the national score of 36%, and 70.3% has a personal friend who is Black or African American, compared to the 63% national value.

Compared to national data, our community has greater religious diversity (Q29), with our sample reporting 70.3% Christian, 6.2% Jewish, 9.1% other, and 14.3% no religion, compared to the national sample reports of 82.0% Christian, 1.0% Jewish, 4.0% other, and 14.0% no religion. Similarly, compared to national data, our community is more balanced politically and socially (Q27), at 33.3% conservative, 29.1% middle-of-road, and 37.5% liberal, compared to the national distribution of 47.0% conservative, 29.0% middle-of-road, and 24.0% liberal.

Trust

In a phrase, we have similar or higher levels of trust when compared with national data (net trust, i.e., trust them "a lot" and trust them "some"):

Q	Trust people...	CNJR Sample (%)	National Sample (%)	Difference (%)
6	in general	45	44	+1
7A	in your neighborhood	84	81	+3
7B	you work with	85	82	+3
7D	work in stores	83	79	+4
7F	local police	87	83	+4
7G	white	89	87	+2
7H	black	87	84	+3
7I	Asian	88	84	+4
7J	Hispanic	87	83	+4

Other Comparisons to the 2006 National Data

Most residents are very satisfied with their lives (Q9). On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 representing "extremely satisfied") 88.4% of the sample selected 7, 8, 9 and 10 on the scale, compared to 83.0% at the national level. Similarly, 89.8% of the sample consider their health to be good to excellent, compared to 83.0% at the national level (Q10), and 86.2% of the sample is

“very” or “somewhat” satisfied with their present financial situation, compared to, again, 83.0% at the national level (Q45). Three and one-half percent more of our sample compared to the national (75.5% to 72%) believe it is “very” or “somewhat” unlikely they will be a victim of a crime in the next 12 months (Q15).

Slightly more of our residents (85.2%) rate their community as an excellent or good place to live, than the national sample (84.0%), and a much higher percentage of our residents read the newspaper daily than residents do nationally, 40% to 28% (Q14).

Improving Levels of Social Capital

As seen, the essential message is that *while we have good levels of social capital, generally at the national level, given our overall education and income, they can be better*. Now, we assess the degree to which we are well-positioned and have what it takes to increase these levels. The first important point is that most respondents – 61.3% – reported that there are no obstacles or barriers that make it difficult for them to be as involved with their community as they would like (Q39).²³ Of those who did, we can likely overcome the identified barriers through community efforts, education programs, targeted advertising and promotion of opportunities, and Foundation programs. The next table presents the percent of respondents who indicated which various obstacles are “very” or “somewhat” important.

Question	Obstacle	CNJR Sample (%)
Q39E	Lack of information	43
Q39F	Feel can't make difference	31
Q39C	Feeling unwelcome	25
Q39D	Concerns for safety	23
Q39B	Inadequate transportation	16

While organizations can make efforts to address these barriers, at the individual level efforts to improve levels of social capital can start with the simple message that people can make time to become more involved their community. Given the available data, specific ways to flesh out this message can be tailored as part of the development of the dissemination stage of the project. We could speak to volunteering (in the past year, 39.7% of the sample never volunteered, and 70.4% volunteered less than once a month (Q58)), or community involvement (over the past year 58.2% of the sample never attended a club meeting, and 51% never attended a public meeting (Q56E and Q56L)), or “mere” socialization and play. In the past year, the following percentages never participated in the following social-capital building activities “attended celebration, parade, sports or art event in community” 27%; “taken part in artistic group” 62.6%; “played cards or board games” 34.2%, or “played a team sport 70.7% (Q56A, Q56B, Q56C, and Q56J).

One potential suspected constraint is that educated people expect more from their volunteer work. Understanding this expectation may be useful to help inform strategies to stimulate

²³ Interestingly, about half of those surveyed do not have children aged 17 or younger living in their households, so child care does not constitute a constraining factor for them (Q47).

volunteerism that serves real community needs, while satisfying the desires of the volunteer to maximize the service value of their time and skills. Volunteers and participants, themselves, then should be considered as both a resource and as a constituency with needs to be met. We also have anecdotal evidence that once well-educated volunteers clarify their interests, skills, and desires, they are better able to realize more interesting and personally rewarding volunteer opportunities. This important insight highlights an entry barrier that may attend higher than average levels of education. We may need to think about a mechanism to help people better and more easily identify their interests and talents and match those interests and talents to an opportunity that fills a meaningful community need.

IV. Conclusion and Preliminary Recommendations

At the risk of sounding glib, the fundamental conclusion of an in-depth analysis of these data is that *while we have good levels of social capital, generally at the national level, given our overall education and income, they can be better.* And, as stated above, this conclusion is buttressed by the observation that the population reflected by the respondent pool is, by and large, favorably situated to receive motivating messages about efforts to increase the regional levels of social capital. This, of course, can constitute a double-edged sword, i.e., to the degree that our levels of social capital compare favorably with national levels, we will need to be vigilant to avoid “comparative complacency,” i.e., to motivate people to optimize as opposed to merely satiate their community’s levels of social capital.

The challenge, then, is educational as well as structural, i.e., in addition to providing opportunities for social capital building activities, motivated agencies need to carefully explain the importance of social capital and community building in terms of the benefits to individuals and community. For this, we circle back to our initial motivation, i.e., that “much evidence suggests that where levels of social capital are higher, children grow up healthier, safer and better educated, people live longer, happier lives, and democracy and the economy work better.”²⁴ Determining, however, exactly how that message is crafted and exactly which survey findings will be used to support it, must abide the empanelment of public relations and companion dissemination efforts.

Assuming the Foundations are interested in a follow-on study so that we can assess social capital changes over time and in response to affirmative efforts, the key methodological recommendations are two-fold: First, we might consider using post-survey data collection focus groups to trace some of the processes and to unpack some of the causal mechanisms at play in an effort to best understand how to use these data to inform and target efforts to stimulate social capital. Secondly, we might consider repeating the survey during 2013, which will allow for the passage of five years from the point at which such social capital stimulating efforts were initiated.

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²⁴ Putnam, 2007 at 138.

For follow-up questions or clarification on any part of this project, please contact:

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