

Social capital in diverse communities

Summary

We have tested the theory that ethnic diversity has a negative effect on social capital using data from the Home Office Citizenship Survey (HOCS). We have found that the relationship with trust in neighbours is significant and negative, after controlling for other individual and area level factors.

Social capital and diversity

Since the end of the 1990s several researchers have investigated the importance of social capital in societies in relation to the welfare of populations. A specific aspect of their contribution is the study of the relationship between diversity and social capital.

In these studies diversity has been defined according to the definition given by Joseph Greenberg in 1959: "*the probability that randomly paired members of a population will be different on a specified characteristic.*". This definition implicitly measures the degree by which a population is divided across different groups. Depending on the context, the index can be defined in terms of ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, etc.

These studies have generally concluded that the greater the degree of diversity in a population, the less likely is that an individual will 'invest' in forms of social capital across the community. This happens because greater diversity means smaller groups overall. There are some exceptions to this conclusion. For example, if little effort to participate is required, even small sized groups may generate social capital. Therefore, greater diversity may actually lead to an overall increase of social capital. These studies have also identified a number of moderating factors at individual level.

Further studies have highlighted a number of issues that need to be investigated, such as:

- the confounding effect of urbanisation;
- the imperfect measurement of localised concentration of groups;
- the results obtained for the USA society may not be applicable to other nations;
- other indices may better reflect forms of separation between groups;
- the importance of the action of local government agencies on individual attitudes.

We aim test the relationship between social capital and diversity taking into account some of these issues, using data from England and Wales.

Testing the relationship

Using HOCS and Census Data in England and Wales

We have derived our dataset from the Home Office Citizenship Survey for 2003. It contains 14,057 individual interviews. We added ethnic and socio-economic diversity index values to the individual records. We calculated these indices using Census 2001 data. The diversity indices describe the level of diversity of the Middle Layer Super Output Areas. This is a geographical unit defined by the ONS with an average population size of 7,100 individuals

Social capital indicators

We have measured social capital indirectly by using eight indicators:

- Formal volunteering
- Civic engagement
- Trust in:

- neighbours
- local government
- courts
- police
- Parliament
- and employers

Controlling for individual factors

We have included in our analysis a range of controlling factors at individual, household and local area level. We have also included key factors such as: 1) the perception of one's own ethnic group being discriminated against; 2) the level of cultural integration; 3) past contacts with institutions.

Measuring diversity

We have adopted the diversity index that represents the definition given by Greenberg. We defined the index for ethnic diversity and for socio-economic diversity. We used the classifications for ethnicity on five categories and NS-Sec for seven categories.

Preliminary results

Bivariate Analysis

Ethnic diversity has a strong negative association only with trust in neighbours. In two other cases (Civic engagement and trust in Parliament) the relationship is actually positive. These results suggest that the relationship between diversity and social capital is not straightforward. Socio-economic diversity does not seem to have strong associations – either positive or negative – for the eight social capital indicators.

Logistic regression model for trust in neighbours

We used logistic regression to test a model that explains the influence of ethnic diversity on trust in neighbours. We controlled for a range of individual and area level factors.

The results of the regression show that ethnic diversity has a strong, negative effect on the odds of expressing trust in neighbours. All other factors being equal, an individual living in an area with a single ethnic group is twice as likely to trust neighbours compared with an individual living in an area where the population is evenly split between five ethnic groups. The effect of ethnic diversity is either as strong as or stronger than the other significant explanatory variables.

We are carrying out further work to improve the robustness of the model. We are also testing the relationship of ethnic diversity with other social capital indicators. We plan to test alternative models that use other indices.

We are planning to test all results for bias due to design of the HOCS 2003 survey. We also plan to carry out multi-level modelling to estimate the degree of variation in social capital associated with ethnic diversity.