



Journal of Religion & Society

The Kripke Center

Volume 13 (2011)

A Test of Nordic Exceptionalism

The Association of Ethnic Heritage and Religion with Social Capital and Civic Engagement in Small U.S. Towns

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to discover the unique and interactive effects of ethnic heritages and religious traditions on social capital and civic engagement. Findings support the Nordic exceptionalism thesis. Small Iowa towns populated with a higher proportion of Scandinavian descendents have more social capital and civic engagement than towns where other ethnic heritages predominate. However, the Lutheran affiliation of Scandinavian descendents accounts for the high level of both social capitals. Thus towns with more residents affiliated with the Lutheran denomination, regardless of the ethnic ancestry of residents, had more social capital.

Introduction

[1] In an analysis of ethnic ancestry and generalized trust, Uslaner concluded, “Where you stand depends upon where your grandparents sat” (2008). This is Uslaner’s way of describing his finding that generalized trust (the belief that most people including strangers can be trusted) and civic engagement are brought by immigrants to their new countries along with their native language, taste in food, and religious preferences; and the pattern endures for generations. Earlier research by Rice and his colleagues supports Uslaner’s claim (Rice and Ling; Rice and Feldman).

[2] The Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Finland) consistently lead other nations in levels of generalized trust (Delhey and Newton; Uslaner 2008). Correspondingly,

research suggests that places in the U.S. populated with a high proportion of descendants of immigrants from the Nordic countries have higher levels of social capital than places with smaller proportions (Putnam 2000; Rice and Ling; Rice and Feldman). Social capital and civic engagement will be elaborated below. For now, it is sufficient to note that social capital and generalized trust are conceptually related and frequently conflated empirically. Civic engagement refers to behavior such as working on community projects, voting, and serving on local boards to promote the public good. Delhey and Newton propose that Nordic exceptionalism is due to the confluence in the Scandinavian countries of several factors: the predominance of mainline Protestant (overwhelmingly Lutheran) traditions, good government, ethnic homogeneity, overall prosperity, and relative equality of income. While they recognize that the direction of causation among these factors is uncertain, they argue it is likely that religion and ethnic homogeneity directly contribute to a high level of generalized trust and indirectly affect trust through their association with good government, prosperity, and income equality.

[3] The association of religion with social capital and civic engagement has received a great deal of attention. In general, church membership has been shown to be positively associated with civic engagement (Hodgkinson; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady; Regnerus, Smith, and Sikkink; Wilson and Janoski), but research that distinguishes between religious denominations reveals a more nuanced picture. Jews, mainline Protestants (Presbyterian, Episcopalian, Methodist, Lutheran, and Church of Christ), and Roman Catholics (in the U.S.) are more likely to belong to civic organizations (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Driskell, Lyon, and Embry) and have more generalized trust (Welch et al.) than members of conservative, evangelical Protestant (Southern Baptists, Jehovah Witnesses, Church of the Latter Day Saints, and non-aligned Protestant congregations) and “other” (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Eastern Orthodoxy) denominations. Mainline Protestant denominations are aggregated together in this research due to scholars’ assessment that they have comparable social teachings and traditions of working with diverse groups for the general welfare (Wuthnow 1999; Steensland et al.).

[4] To my knowledge, no studies have examined religious affiliation and ethnic ancestry together as they relate to social capital and civic engagement at the community level of analysis. The purpose of this paper is to fill this gap in the literature by using data from a relatively large sample of small Iowa towns. The research questions to be addressed are:

- Which is more important in predicting community levels of social capital and civic engagement: ethnic heritage or religious affiliation?
- Is there an interactive effect between these factors such that towns with, for example, a high proportion of residents of Nordic descent and Lutheran affiliation, or Irish descent and Catholic affiliation, have more social capital and civic engagement compared to what would be expected from the sum of the independent effects of these factors?

I examine social capital and civic engagement in small towns in the same state. This provides a way to control quality of government, general prosperity, and income equality. The sampled towns are all subject to the same state and federal laws and policies, have similar

economic conditions, and have low-income inequality.¹ They vary in the Northern European ethnic heritage of residents and in religious affiliation (various mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic denominations).

[5] Understanding the roots of Nordic exceptionalism is important to the project of enhancing social capital and civic engagement in communities regardless of the ethnic ancestry of residents. And for many small towns, social capital and civic engagement are critical resources for community development. Over and above the practical significance of this knowledge, explicating the relationship of ethnicity, religion, social capital, and civic engagement at the community level of analysis advances the renewed scholarly interest in collectivities. Analysts have criticized the individualistic bias of research over the last three decades and urged a return to a focus on groups, communities, and organizations in their own right (Eckstein; McPherson and Rotolo; Schein). Studying how towns with varying ethnic and religious compositions differ from each other in social capital and civic engagement will help us understand the complex interaction of factors that impact communities' ability to solve problems and enhance residents' quality of life.

Theoretical Framework

Social Capital and Civic Engagement

[6] In this paper, social capital is defined as relationships characterized by trust and norms of reciprocity that can be used for collective action (Putnam 1993; 2000). Prior research has shown that places with more social capital have more effective local government (Putnam 1993; Rice), are more likely to initiate community betterment projects (Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan; Putnam and Feldstein), and have more favorable economic outcomes (Besser 1999; Flora et al.; Knack and Keefer; Narayan; Putnam 1993; Putnam and Feldstein; Tiepoh and Reimer). Within large cities, neighborhoods with more social capital are associated with higher civic engagement and lower levels of crime (Messner, Baume, and Rosenfeld; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls).

[7] The early literature focused on the benefits of social capital while ignoring its potential for negative consequences (Portes and Landolt; Portes). Critics point out that social capital is created and nurtured by religious cults, criminal gangs, and special interest groups that work to realize their groups' advantage without regard for the public good. A community characterized by exclusive groups high in social capital will be limited in the information and resources shared between groups and therefore, will be less effective in solving common problems (Woolcock). To address this shortcoming, scholars have elaborated social capital into two variants, bridging and bonding social capital (Gittell and Vidal; Narayan; Woolcock).

[8] Bridging social capital entails linkages between members of diverse groups. It is present when people from different backgrounds and life situations know and trust each other and work together. Communities with high levels of bridging social capital should be able to pool the non-redundant resources of different groups and generate a strong sense of community

¹ An examination of the 1990 and 2000 GINI coefficients for the sampled towns revealed that there was essentially no variation between the sampled towns and no change across the decade.

identity and attachment that transcends the special interests of individuals and groups. These factors will in turn, facilitate effective problem solving and community development. Conversely, a high level of bonding social capital means there are strong ties within groups, sometimes to the exclusion of ties to those outside the group. In this situation, individuals will be strongly motivated to conform to group norms and act for the group's benefit instead of the welfare of the community as a whole. But some scholars argue that a combination of both bonding social capital and bridging social capital provides the optimum situation for community development (Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan; Putnam, 2000; 2007).

[9] Civic engagement consists of actions that promote the general welfare of the community such as voting, serving on local boards, and volunteering to clean up a community park. Due to their close association with bridging and bonding social capital, voting and volunteering have often been used as indicators of social capital (Casey and Christ; Knack and Keefer; Paxton; Putnam 2000; Putnam and Feldstein; Robison and Siles; Rupasingha, Goetz, and Freshwater; Western et al.; Wood and Warren). This has led to conceptual confusion between social capital and one of its anticipated consequences, civic engagement. In this analysis, bonding and bridging social capital and civic engagement are treated as distinct constructs thus avoiding a common shortcoming of previous studies. Even though it is likely that bonding and bridging social capital and civic engagement are reciprocally related to each other, for the purposes of this paper, their relationship will be conceptualized as a linear association with bonding and bridging social capital positively impacting civic engagement.

Ethnicity, Social Capital, and Civic Engagement

[10] Recently scholars have been more interested in how ethnic heterogeneity affects social capital and civic engagement than on how ethnic groups compare with each other on these dimensions. This reflects the growing tensions in the U.S. and the European Union caused by increased immigration of ethnic groups with different worldviews, value systems, and traditions compared to the local culture. The consensus of this literature is that greater ethnic diversity is accompanied by growth of an "us vs. them" perspective and correspondingly higher bonding social capital, lower bridging social capital, and lower civic engagement (Anderson and Paskeviciute; Knack and Keefer; Delhey and Newton; Rice and Steele). However, Putnam (2007) argues that although trust between different ethnic and racial groups is lower in places with greater heterogeneity, trust of members in one's own group is lower also. This is because, he maintains, people living in heterogeneous communities restrict their interaction in general, including their ties with members of their own ethnic or racial group. Under these circumstances, both bonding and bridging social capital will be lower than in more homogeneous communities.

[11] While the consequences of ethnic heterogeneity caused by recent immigration is critically important, the question addressed in this analysis relates to Nordic exceptionalism. It requires an examination of the social capital and civic engagement of towns composed of varying proportions of descendants of the Scandinavian countries. As indicated previously, scholars generally agree that descendants of Scandinavian immigrants have higher levels of generalized trust and civic engagement than descendants of immigrants from other countries (Delhey and Newton; Rice and Feldman; Rice and Ling; Uslaner 2008). Generalized trust is theoretically akin to bridging social capital. Therefore, small Iowa towns with more residents

of Scandinavian ancestry should have more bridging social capital and civic engagement than other towns. Further, it is reasonable to assume that towns with a large proportion of residents who share a common ethnic heritage will have more bonding social capital regardless of whether the ancestry is Scandinavian or German or Mexican. This line of reasoning leads to the following hypotheses.

- H1. Small towns with a higher proportion of residents with Scandinavian ancestry will have more bonding social capital than other towns.
- H2. Small towns with a higher proportion of residents with Scandinavian ancestry will have more civic engagement than other towns.
- H3. Small towns with a higher proportion of residents with a common ancestry will have more bridging social capital than other towns.

Religion, Social Capital, and Civic Engagement

[12] Several aspects of belonging to a religious denomination are likely to encourage members to get involved in the community and work for community betterment. Religion entails a system of beliefs that promotes fellowship and caring for others (Hodgkinson; Wilson and Musick; Wuthnow 1999). Members of religious congregations become acquainted with other members who may provide personal invitations to join church and community groups that offer involvement in community betterment (Oliver). Church groups offer the opportunity to learn leadership and group skills that can be utilized in civic organizations and community groups (Verba, Schlozman, and Brady; Wood and Warren). Research generally supports this logic. Individuals who are affiliated with a religious tradition volunteer at higher rates, belong to more community organizations (Hodgkinson; Verba, Schlozman, and Brady; Wilson and Janoski), and donate more money to charitable causes than the unaffiliated (Regnerus, Smith, and Sikkink)

[13] Another stream of research goes beyond determining how religious affiliation in general affects social capital and civic engagement to consider the differential impact of religious denominations. Most of the recent research in this literature uses some variation of Streebom et al.'s categorization of Protestant denominations into Black Protestant, White mainline Protestant, and White conservative Protestant denominations. The classification of Protestant denominations into either mainline or fundamentalist/conservative categories is determined by the denomination's membership in the National Council of Churches for mainline denominations and the National Association of Evangelicals for conservative and evangelical denominations (Streebom et al.). Members of White mainline Protestant denominations, Roman Catholics, and Jews have consistently ranked higher in levels of generalized trust and civic engagement than members of White conservative Protestant denominations and Black Protestant denominations (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Driskell, Lyon, and Embry; Welch et al.).

[14] The soundness of Streebom et al.'s classification schema is challenged, however, by research findings demonstrating that Protestant denominations assigned to the same category have dissimilar levels of social capital and civic engagement. For example, Hoge et al. discovered that members of two White mainline Protestant denominations, Lutherans and Presbyterians, were significantly more likely than members of other White mainline

Protestant denominations to volunteer for secular causes. In Wilson and Janoski's panel study, only Catholics, Jews, and Episcopalians (a White mainline Protestant denomination) had higher levels of involvement in community projects compared to the unaffiliated in the 1973 wave. Members of other White mainline Protestant denominations more closely resembled the unaffiliated than they resembled Episcopalians. By 1982, only Methodists, another White mainline Protestant denomination, among the mainline Protestant members differed from the unaffiliated. Using data from Indiana, Schwadel concluded that Lutherans and Southern Baptists (a White conservative Protestant denomination) were alike in having less civic participation as measured by memberships in non-church organizations as compared to Catholics, while members of other White mainline Protestant denominations were not significantly different from Catholics. These conclusions suggest that there may be as much variation within Streenland et al.'s Protestant denomination categories as between them.

[15] Recent changes in church affiliation in the United States have also affected how church membership affects civic engagement. Membership in conservative, Pentecostal, unaffiliated evangelical, and fundamentalist congregations has grown, while mainline Protestant membership has declined (Iannaccone; Wuthnow 1999). Some studies show that members of conservative and evangelical churches may be more likely to form tightly bonded in-groups and less likely to volunteer for general community betterment or join civic organizations (Beyerlein and Hipp 2006; Driskell, Lyon, and Embry; Schwadel; Wilson and Janoski), but Welch et al. discovered no difference between White conservative Protestants and White mainline Protestants in generalized trust, except that Pentecostals were less trusting than both groups. The impact of evangelical and/or conservative religious denominations on social capital and civic engagement is not germane for this analysis, however. An examination of data from the Glenmary Research Center's "Religious Congregations and Membership: 2000 Report" for Iowa counties revealed very low levels of affiliation with conservative, evangelical denominations, essentially no variance in affiliation levels across counties in Iowa, and no significant change in affiliation from 1980 to 2000.

[16] This literature suggests that in spite of the apparent similarity of the teachings and traditions of denominations in the mainline and conservative and/or evangelical categories, the social capital and civic engagement of specific Protestant denominations often varies from other denominations within the same category. Other factors, such as the association of ethnicity with religious affiliation may be confounding research findings on this subject. Given the inconsistent conclusions of past research, it is difficult to predict how membership in various mainline Christian denominations will be related to bonding and bridging social capital and civic engagement. However, for the purpose of testing the Nordic exceptionalism thesis, I propose that the greater the proportion of Lutherans in a town, the higher the level of bonding and bridging social capital and civic engagement.

- H4. Small towns with a higher proportion of Lutherans will have more bonding social capital than other towns.
- H5. Small towns with a higher proportion of Lutherans will have more bridging social capital than other towns.

- H6. Small towns with a higher proportion of Lutherans will have more civic engagement than other towns.

In addition, I propose an interaction effect between Lutheranism and Scandinavian ancestry such that:

- H7. Small towns with a high proportion of Lutherans and residents of Scandinavian ancestry will have more bonding and bridging social capital and civic engagement than other towns.

Methodology

Data

[17] The data used in this analysis were generated from a longitudinal study of 99 small Iowa towns conducted in 1994 and 2004. One town from each of Iowa's 99 counties was selected at random from all towns in the county that were not contiguous to a metropolitan city and that had a 1990 population between 500 and 10,000. One hundred and fifty households living in or near each of the selected towns were randomly selected from the local telephone directory² and contacted using a modified Dillman sampling strategy (1978; 2000). The unit of analysis is the town, with residents viewed as key informants about life in the towns. I employed only the 2004 data for this examination. The response rate in 2004 was 67 percent.

Variables

[18] Indicators of population size and ethnic ancestry of residents of sampled towns were taken from the 2000 U. S. Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census). Since town population size was not normally distributed in the sample, the log of population was used in the analyses. The most frequently identified countries of origin of all Iowa residents in the 2000 U.S. Census were Germany (35.75% of residents), Ireland (13.53%), the Scandinavian countries (11.24%), England (9.48%), Holland (4.58%), and France (2.58%) (Goudy 2008). The first four ethnicities will be used in the analysis. All other concepts were measured with questions from the survey.

[19] Religious denomination was determined by asking respondents, "What is your religious preference?" with response categories of Catholic, Protestant, none, Jewish, Islam/Moslem, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other. Those who responded Protestant were asked to write in their specific denomination. Their responses were subsequently grouped into Methodist, Presbyterian, Baptist, Episcopalian, Lutheran, Latter Day Saints/Mormon, Reformed, Jehovah's Witness, Mennonite, Non-denominational, other, evangelical, Christian, United Church of Christ, and Assembly of God categories. Very few respondents provided information about which sub-denomination of the broader Protestant denomination they preferred (e.g. Missouri Synod Lutherans vs. Free Evangelical Lutherans within the Lutheran category). This is a common problem encountered by researchers wherein respondents either do not know their specific sub-denomination or select the broader denominational

² To assess the adequacy of the telephone directory as a sampling frame, comparisons of sample characteristics to census figures were conducted. Results of these comparisons indicated that the sample was representative of the population based on a 99% confidence interval (Ryan, Terry, and Besser; Ryan, Terry, and Woebke).

Table 1. Descriptive and Factor Scale Statistics for Measures of Social Capital and Civic Engagement in 2004 (N=99)

	Mean	S.D.	Factor
Bonding Social Capital			
1. On a scale of 1 to 7 where 1=friendly and 7=unfriendly, rate <i>town</i>	2.52	.30	.91
2. Being a resident of <i>town</i> is like living with a group of close friends ³	2.51	.20	.93
3. Our neighborhood is closely knit ³	2.86	.16	.83
Cronbach's alpha, % variance explained		.84, 78.99%	
Bridging Social Capital			
1. On a scale of 1 to 7 where 7=not trusting and 1=trusting, rate <i>town</i>	3.05	.29	.91
2. Clubs and organizations are interested in what is best for all residents ³	2.46	.18	.84
3. Residents of <i>town</i> are receptive to new residents in leadership positions ³	2.90	.18	.79
4. I think that "every person for themselves" is a good description of how people in <i>town</i> act (reverse coded) ³	3.40	.21	.85
5. When something needs to get done in <i>town</i> , the whole community usually gets behind it ³	2.66	.29	.86
6. People in <i>town</i> look out mainly for what's best for their friends and family, and are not much concerned about the welfare of other local people (reverse coded) ³	3.10	.20	.93
Cronbach's alpha, % variance explained		.86, 72.16%	
Civic Engagement			
During the last 12 months have you personally been approached by someone in <i>town</i> to do the following: (responses, 1=no, 2=yes)			
1. Donate money to a community fund drive.	1.40	.49	.59
2. Volunteer time to work on a community improvement project.	1.71	.45	.75
3. Join or participate in a local organization or group.	1.64	.48	.71
4. Vote in a local election.	1.36	.48	.55
5. Attend a meeting related to a community issue.	1.63	.48	.69
6. How many times in the past 12 months have you participated in a <i>town</i> improvement project such as a volunteer project or a fund raising effort? (1=none, 2=once, 3=twice, 4= 3 to 4 times, 5 = 5 to 9 times, 6=10 or more).	2.29	1.50	.72
7. Considering ALL the types of groups and organizations listed above, about how many local groups in total do you belong to?	1.52	1.66	.79
Cronbach's alpha, % variance explained		.77, 47.14%	

category for other reasons (Driskell, Lyon, and Embry). Therefore, I have incomplete information about affiliation in sub-denominations within the broader denominations. I suggest, nevertheless, that the error involved in aggregating members of the more conservative and liberal sub-denominations together in the larger denominational categories is low. As indicated previously, the Glenmary Research Center's "Religious Congregations

³ Responses scored on a scale from 1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree.

and Membership: 2000 Report” revealed very low levels of affiliation with conservative, evangelical denominations in Iowa counties and essentially no variance across Iowa counties.

[20] For the sake of parsimony, at least 15% of respondents in at least one town had to be affiliated with a particular denomination in order for it to be retained in the examination. The denominations that met this standard were Lutheran (average percent affiliated = 21.12%, range 0 to 79.2%), Methodist (average percent affiliated = 19.91%, range 0 to 47.0%), Catholic (average percent affiliated = 19.07%, range 1.2 to 85.8%), Presbyterian (average percent affiliated = 5.48%, range 0 to 42.6%), and Baptist (average percent affiliated = 4.68%, range 0 to 19.5%). Further analysis revealed that the proportion of Presbyterians was not significantly related to any ethnic group or to the dependent variables. Therefore, it was excluded from further analysis.

[21] The dependent variables, bonding and bridging social capital, and civic engagement were measured with factor scaled indices created from questions on the survey. Table 1 contains the exact wording for questions in the indices, factor scale statistics, and descriptive statistics. Principal component factor analysis with no rotation was used to determine the internal consistency of the indices. The factor loadings and Cronbach’s alpha reliability score were considered sufficient for all factor scale variables according to standards developed by Kim and Moeller. The factor scaled indices were calculated at the individual level of analysis. Then the mean values for each community were determined and added to the community level data.

[22] The survey items used to measure bonding and bridging social capital were derived from questions developed by Glynn and used previously by Agnitsch, Flora, and Ryan, Besser, and Rice (2001). The bonding social capital index consists of responses to three questions measuring the extent to which residents feel close to others in the town. The indicator of bridging social capital contains six items assessing generalized trust and the extent to which community norms support a public good orientation. The variable measuring civic engagement combined responses to questions about invitations to participate in the community, actual involvement in community betterment efforts, and membership in local organizations.

Results

[23] Table 2 contains the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for the variables examined in this paper. Since the social capital and civic engagement variables are factor scaled indices, we would expect the average of the community averages to be close to 0, which they are. The proportions of residents in these towns reporting German, Scandinavian, English, and Irish heritage are similar to the state percentages for ethnic ancestry reported above. There is clear alignment of ethnicities with different religious affiliations in these towns. German ethnicity and Catholicism are positively associated, indicating that the Germans who settled in Iowa were more likely to be Catholic than Lutheran. Towns with a higher proportion of Scandinavians also have a high proportion of Lutherans. Towns with more descendants of English immigrants have a larger share of Methodists and Baptists than other towns, and towns with an Irish heritage are more Catholic.

Table 2. Community Level Descriptive Statistics and Correlations (N=99)

	Mean	S.D.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Bonding social capital	.01	.22											
2. Bridging social capital	.01	.27	.81**										
3. Civic engagement	.00	.21	.36**	.35**									
4. Percent German ancestry	37.07	12.63	.16	.12	.09								
5. Percent Scandinavian ancestry	12.83	10.58	.13	.20*	.33**	.15							
6. Percent English ancestry	9.02	3.28	-.17 τ	-.10	-.07	-.48**	-.25*						
7. Percent Irish ancestry	12.26	4.16	.00	-.03	.04	.05	-.30**	.24*					
8. Percent Catholic	19.07	16.84	.16	.12	.18 τ	.43**	-.11	-.25*	.41**				
9. Percent Lutheran	21.12	17.49	.25*	.27**	.28**	.16	.60**	-.16 τ	-.17 τ	-.10			
10. Percent Methodist	19.91	11.48	-.19 τ	-.12*	-.14	-.34**	-.05	.19 τ	-.17 τ	-.44**	-.28**		
11. Percent Baptist	4.68	4.72	-.10	-.17*	-.13	-.28**	-.22*	.22*	-.09	-.38**	-.31**	.15	
12. Log 2000 population	1879	2036	-.35**	-.27**	.25*	-.06	.08	.17 τ	.20*	.08	.07	-.10	.08

$\tau = p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

[24] Turning now to the dependent variables, bonding and bridging social capital are highly correlated and both are significantly associated with civic engagement. Towns with a greater proportion of residents who report affiliation with Lutheranism have more bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and civic engagement. A high percentage of Scandinavian residents is associated with more bridging social capital and civic engagement, but not bonding social capital. The percentages of residents with German and Irish ancestry are not associated with any of the dependent variables, while a greater share of residents with English ancestry is negatively related to bonding social capital. Towns with more Catholics have more civic engagement, those with more Methodists have lower bonding social capital, and towns with more Baptists have lower bridging social capital.

Table 3. Predictors of Community Bonding and Bridging Social Capital; OLS Regression, Standardized Coefficients (T-Values)

	Bonding		Bridging	
	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3	Equation 4
Log 2000 population	-.38 (-3.82)*	-.42 (-4.39)**	-.31 (-3.06)**	-.34 (-3.31)**
Ethnicity				
Percent German	.07 (.61)	-.02 (-.20)	.06 (.53)	-.03 (-.23)
Percent Scandinavian	.18 (1.71) τ	.04 (.38)	.26 (2.43)*	.13 (1.04)
Percent English	-.06 (-.52)	-.02 (-.18)	.02 (.14)	.06 (.50)
Percent Irish	.14 (1.34)	.07 (.61)	.10 (.96)	.02 (.19)
Religion				
Percent Catholic		.24 (1.81) τ		.22 (1.54)
Percent Lutheran		.33 (2.55)*		.26 (1.94) τ
Percent Methodist		-.04 (-.37)		-.00 (-.02)
Percent Baptist		.15 (1.39)		.03 (.23)
Adj R ²	.13	.19	.09	.12
F statistic	3.95**	3.62**	2.95*	2.45*

$\tau = p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

[25] In the multivariate OLS analysis presented in Tables 3 and 4, the ethnic heritage and religious affiliation variables were entered separately in sets in order to test the Nordic exceptionalism thesis before and after religion was controlled. The equations predicting bonding and bridging social capital (in Table 3) confirm that towns with more residents reporting Scandinavian ethnicity are significantly more likely than towns with a preponderance of other Northern European heritages to have more bonding and bridging social capital. However, the difference disappears when religious affiliation is entered. It appears as if Scandinavian heritage affects social capital through its affiliation with the Lutheran religion. The findings indicate that smaller towns with a higher proportion of Lutherans have more bridging and bonding social capital and towns with more Catholics have more bonding social capital.

Table 4. Predictors of Community Civic Engagement (N=99); OLS Regression, Standardized Coefficients (T-Value)

	Equation 1	Equation 2	Equation 3	Equation 4
Log 2000 population	.21 (2.15)*	.19 (.19) τ	.38 (3.73)**	.31 (3.06)**
Ethnicity				
Percent German	.04 (.35)	-.04 (-.35)	-.03 (-.29)	-.03 (-.29)
Percent Scandinavian	.32 (3.12)**	.26 (2.11)*	.24 (2.14)*	.22 (1.84)*
Percent English	-.03 (-.25)	.02 (.18)	.03 (.29)	.00 (.01)
Percent Irish	.09 (.89)	.01 (.04)	-.02 (-.24)	-.00 (-.03)
Religion				
Percent Catholic		.25 (1.78) τ	.14 (1.09)	.17 (1.30)
Percent Lutheran		.16 (1.19)	.01 (.11)	.07 (.52)
Percent Methodist		.02 (.16)	.04 (.35)	.02 (.18)
Percent Baptist		.04 (.36)	-.03 (-.26)	.03 (.29)
Social Capital				
Bonding			.44 (4.44)**	
Bridging				.36 (3.59)**
Adj R ²	.12	.13	.28	.23
F statistic	3.70**	2.60**	4.79**	3.93**

$\tau = p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

[25] The analyses shown in Table 4 provide insight into whether religious affiliation is more important than ethnicity in predicting civic engagement when social capital is controlled. Both Scandinavian ancestry and Lutheran church affiliation are positively associated with civic engagement. However, when bridging and bonding social capital are entered in equations 3 and 4, Scandinavian ethnicity remains significant and Lutheran affiliation becomes non-significant. Lutheranism may be affecting civic engagement through its positive association with the social capitals while Scandinavian ancestry impacts civic engagement independently of the social capitals. According to these findings, larger towns with more bridging and bonding social capital and a higher proportion of residents of Scandinavian descent have more civic engagement than other small towns.

[26] To test the interaction of Scandinavian ancestry and affiliation with the Lutheran denomination on social capital and civic engagement, an interaction variable was created by multiplying the two independent variables. The results of regressing percent Scandinavian, percent Lutheran, and the interaction variable on the dependent variables are shown in Table 5. Consistent with findings displayed in the full models in Table 3, percent Lutheran is positively related to both kinds of social capital, but Scandinavian ancestry is not. The interaction variable is not significantly related to bonding social capital, bridging social capital, nor civic engagement. Only log 2000 population size is significantly related to civic engagement. The equations reveal that smaller towns with a higher proportion of Lutherans

have more bridging and bonding social capital when percent Scandinavian, log 2000 population, and the interaction of Scandinavian and Lutheran affiliation are controlled.

Table 5: Interaction Effects of Ethnicity and Religion; OLS Regression, Standardized Coefficients (T-Value)

	Bonding SC	Bridging SC	Civic Engagement
Log 2000 population	-.39 (-4.17)**	-.31 (-3.22)**	.22 (2.28)*
Percent Scandinavian	.20 (1.00)	.26 (1.29)	.30 (1.45)
Percent Lutheran	.40 (2.80)**	.34 (2.28)*	.16 (1.07)
Scandinavian x Lutheran	-.32 (-1.31)	-.27 (-1.07)	-.10 (-.39)
Adj R ²	.18	.14	.13
F statistic	6.41**	4.82**	4.69 **

$\tau = p < .1$, * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$

[27] Support is provided for Hypotheses 1 and 2, which predicted that towns with a higher proportion of residents with Scandinavian ethnicity would have more bridging social capital and civic engagement than other towns. It appears however that the Lutheran affiliation of Scandinavian descendents explains the association of Scandinavian ancestry and the social capitals. For when religious affiliation is controlled, Scandinavian ethnicity is no longer associated with the social capitals. Hypothesis 3 is rejected. In the final models, none of the ethnic heritages are significantly related to bonding social capital.

[28] Hypotheses 4 and 5 are also supported. Towns with a higher percentage of residents who are affiliated with the Lutheran religion have higher levels of both social capitals. Hypothesis 6 and 7 are not supported. The findings in Table 4 suggest that Lutheran affiliation is not associated with civic engagement and there is no evidence in Table 5 of an interaction effect of Scandinavian ancestry and Lutheran affiliation on the social capitals or civic engagement.

Discussion

[29] The case for Nordic exceptionalism is upheld in this analysis. Iowa small towns with a higher proportion of residents of Scandinavian ancestry have significantly more bonding social capital, bridging social capital, and civic engagement than other small towns. This conclusion is consistent with findings from previous research (Putnam 2000; Rice and Ling; Rice and Feldman). What is new in this analysis are the discoveries that the Lutheran affiliation of Scandinavian descendents accounts for the high levels of bonding and bridging social capitals in their communities, and the higher civic engagement of towns with Scandinavian descendents prevails even when the social capitals, government policies and effectiveness, level of prosperity, and income equality are controlled.

[30] The assumption that all mainline Protestant denominations are similar in their impact on social capital and civic engagement is called into question here. Small Iowa towns with a large proportion of Methodists are different from towns with more Lutherans in prevailing attitudes of trust, friendliness, and neighborliness; norms of reciprocity; and residents'

involvement in the community. The common practice of aggregating mainline Protestant denominations may make sense in comparisons with fundamentalist and evangelical Protestant denominations, and it certainly is more expedient than considering each denomination separately, but the disadvantage is the loss of information about the uniqueness of the individual Protestant denominations.

[31] Another important finding is the strong positive association of both bonding and bridging social capital with civic engagement. The notion that bonding social capital is detrimental to general community welfare in that it limits the exchange of resources across diverse groups and encourages people to work only for the benefit of their in-group is not supported by small Iowa towns. Instead the evidence confirms Agnitsch, Flora and Ryan's and Putnam's (2000; 2007) contention that both bonding and bridging social capital contribute to community civic engagement.

[32] We are confronted with several puzzles in these findings. First, why do towns with more Lutherans have more bridging and bonding social capital than towns with a higher percentage of Catholics or adherents of other mainline Protestant denominations? Instead of understanding Nordic exceptionalism, these findings beg the question: what is unique about Lutheran traditions and culture that enhances community wide social capital? Second, if Nordic exceptionalism in civic engagement is not explained, as Delhey and Newton propose, by good government, income equality, general prosperity (which are similar in all sampled towns), nor by religion, what accounts for it? What happens in towns with more Scandinavian descendents that motivates residents to join local organizations, volunteer for community projects, and invite others to be similarly involved?

[33] Finally, why do the smallest of these small towns have more bonding and bridging social capital, but less civic engagement than larger towns? It is not surprising that the smallest towns have more bonding social capital. It is easier to know everyone in town and have a sense of friendliness and close ties with neighbors when only 1,000 people live in town compared to a town with a population of 7,000. But one would expect then that the smaller towns would also have more civic engagement. They do not. This is an intriguing discovery. Perhaps bigger towns provide more opportunities to get involved (there are more local organizations and more community projects) or have more effective institutionalized mechanisms (e.g. hired city officials or links to outside organizations) to encourage involvement than smaller towns do. Or perhaps residents in the smallest towns are more likely to experience civic engagement burn out. Fewer residents means that each individual resident must carry a heavier public service, volunteering load than residents of larger towns. When individuals get asked frequently to volunteer, they may feel overburdened and refuse to participate at all. Answering these questions is vitally important to understanding how social capital and civic engagement can be created and sustained. I suggest that future research utilizing in-depth case studies of theoretically sampled communities is best suited to provide answers to the questions.

[34] Small towns, especially those in the Plains and Midwestern states, face a particularly perilous future. Many of them have steadily lost population beginning in the early 1900s, but the trend accelerated with the restructuring of agriculture and the outsourcing of manufacturing and services in the late 1900s. The rural renaissance experienced by small

towns in high amenity locations and adjacent to metropolitan areas never materialized in the Plains and Midwestern states. Under these circumstances, social capital and civic engagement may be the most critical and abundant resources available to small town leaders as they attempt to sustain and revitalize their communities. It is important to learn how to promote high levels of social capital and civic engagement in communities regardless of their ethnic ancestry and religious affiliation. Put differently, understanding Nordic exceptionalism is a first step in eliminating Nordic exceptionalism.

Acknowledgment

This project was funded by the National Research Initiative of the United States Department of Agriculture, Grant 2003-35401-13828

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