



**Social Capital in India:
Networks, Organizations, and Confidence**

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**India Human Development Survey
Working Paper No. 4**

IHDS



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The logo for the India Human Development Survey (IHDS) consists of the letters 'IHDS' in a large, bold, green serif font. The letters are slightly shadowed, giving them a three-dimensional appearance.

Views presented in this paper are authors' personal views and do not reflect institutional opinions.

The results reported in this paper are based primarily on India Human Development Survey, 2005. This survey was jointly organized by researchers at University of Maryland and the National Council of Applied Economic Research. The data collection was funded by grants R01HD041455 and R01HD046166 from the National Institutes of Health to University of Maryland. Part of the sample represents a resurvey of households initially surveyed by NCAER in 1993-94.

ABSTRACT

Using original data from a newly collected nationally representative survey for 40,000 households in India, we examine associations of various dimensions of social capital with each other and with contextual and individual determinants. We focus on three measures of social capital: a positional generator of social networks, a count of memberships in formal organizations, and a subjective index of confidence in institutions. All three scales show good internal reliabilities. Associations among the three are quite low however suggesting that, in India at least, there seems to be little generalization from one type of social capital to another. Further analysis reveals that all three scales reveal strong geographic patterning across India, but only the social networks measure also shows strong relationships with social position within communities. Network contacts are more extensive for high caste, wealthy, and well-educated households. Similar household status associations are much weaker for confidence in institutions and for membership in organizations. These more formal, institutionalized dimensions of social capital depend more on the presence of institutions in the local area, while the more informal measures of social networks reflects also an individual's position within the community.

Social capital has been a useful conceptual umbrella covering several more well-defined forms such as networks, group memberships, civic and political participation as well as subjective aspects such as confidence in institutions and trust in people. Other distinctions have also been shown to be important within these various constructs: for instance between strong and weak ties; between individual and community loci; or between social linkages that cross group boundaries (“bridging capital”) or are limited to ties within a group (however broadly or narrowly that group might be defined). This multidimensionality can sometimes be used as a criticism of the social capital concept, but it can also be seen as a strength, reflecting its richness in organizing an otherwise diverse set of ideas.

Are the conceptual relationships among these social capital concepts mirrored by empirical associations among their specific measures? To what extent is confidence in society’s institutions fostered by (or a prerequisite for) participation in public life? Do members of several formal organizations enjoy the same advantages as those who are well connected in a more informal pattern of social ties? Do these informal and formal network advantages accrue to the same people? Research has grown in recent years to explore these and other empirical relationships among various aspects of social capital. In part, the empirical associations are sometimes evaluated to assess the conceptual unity of the concept. But even if we grant some usefulness to social capital as a conceptual organizing principle regardless of the empirical associations, we need to learn the extent of those associations and, perhaps, the nature of the conditions that promote or deter those associations.

Nowhere are these questions about social capital more compelling than in developing economies where the keys to development are often sought in the informal and institutional relationships necessary for modern social life. This research reports results from a new,

nationally representative survey of over 40,000 Indian households. The survey includes a broad array of social capital questions in addition to a wealth of background on the economic, caste, educational, and health statuses of these households.

Conceptual overview

Two basic distinctions among social capital concepts are the difference between formal, institutionalized linkages and informal networks; and between objective links to other people and institutions and subjective feelings about those links. In the 2x2 table formed by these distinctions, the cells identify four commonly used measures of social capital:

Figure 1. Types of social capital.

	Informal	Formal
Objective	Social networks	Organizational memberships
Subjective	Trust in people	Confidence in institutions

Within each cell, we could make distinctions between strong and weak ties, between links to similar others versus bridging links, between vertical and horizontal links, or between social capital at the individual or community level. These are important distinctions, many of which can be at least approximated in the Indian survey data. In this paper, to keep the topic within reasonable bounds, we will focus on the formal versus informal and the subjective versus objective distinctions.

Formal versus informal social capital.

Social relationships that link individuals to others may be institutionalized if the linkages are created through joint membership in formal organizations. This kind of formal social capital depends on the availability of organizations. Without the existence of the organization,

individuals can hardly become members. In the extreme case, individuals can create new organizations, but the overwhelming numbers of memberships are the result of individuals joining pre-existing organizations. These organizations are not distributed evenly across communities, especially in developing societies. While we can expect systematic differences between individuals who join and do not join organizations, these differences are irrelevant when the organizations are not available to join. So we can expect that where formal organizations are relatively rare, memberships depend more on the characteristics of an individual's immediate context than on the characteristics of the individuals themselves.

Informal social networks do not have this same dependency on existing institutions. As schools become more available, whether one knows a teacher or not depends more on who one is rather than on where one lives. Who one knows is, to be sure, a product of who is available to know. Not many Americans know a Hindu priest; nor do many Indians know a Jewish rabbi. But given a broad distribution of most roles across society, linkages to these roles depend more on the characteristics of the individual than on the characteristics of an individual's immediate context. Contacts with high status or powerful social roles especially depend on the status of the individuals themselves.

Objective versus subjective relations.

Similar considerations apply to how objective and subjective ties to others are socially structured. In general, we should expect objective ties to other individuals to depend more on the characteristics of one's context – the characteristics of those others – while subjective ties would depend more on the characteristics of the subject. While joining a specific organization may depend largely on the presence of that organization in the community, one can have opinions about that organization regardless of its accessibility. In fact, attitudes inevitably cover a far

wider range of institutions than one could ever imagine being a part of. The typical confidence in institutions questions focus on the major political and economic institutions in society (e.g., courts, banks) that are not necessarily locally present in the community.

Nevertheless, attitudes towards various institutions are shaped not only by individuals' position in society and by their relation to those institutions, but also by the characteristics of those institutions in the local community. Schools, medical facilities, and even courts and banks vary from one place to another so it should be expected that this local variation ought to have some influence on the general opinion of these institutions.

This local variation ought to be even less marked for subjective attitudes about people in general than about specific institutions. Of course, much of the interest in generalized trust is precisely in how local cultures vary in the extent of this trust – and thus in the community's capacity to support the formal institutions and impersonal often distant relationships that are required by modern complex societies. Nevertheless, in comparison to attitudes towards specific institutions that may vary from one location to another, subjective attitudes towards generalized others are less likely to vary across place and more likely to vary across characteristics of the subjects themselves.

Hypotheses.

These considerations lead us to the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. Associations between various aspects of social capital should be stronger if both aspects share a similar position on the subjective-objective or the formal-informal dimensions of social capital.

Specifically, considering the four types of social capital described in Figure 1, we expect higher associations of social network characteristics with organizational memberships and with

generalized trust in others than with confidence in specific institutions. Similarly we expect higher associations of organizational memberships with social networks and with confidence in specific institutions than with generalized trust in others.

A principal assumption in the social capital literature is a generally positive association among its various aspects. Sometimes, these positive associations are only implicitly acknowledged, leading to some confusion over how an author actually defines social capital. But in a more multidimensional conceptualization, it is not necessary to identify any one dimension with *the* definition of social capital. Nevertheless, a lack of empirical association among the various aspects of social capital would call into question the usefulness of the broader concept.

Hypothesis 2. Characteristics of the individual should be more highly associated with informal and with subjective aspects of social capital. Characteristics of the individual's context should be more highly associated with formal and objective aspects of social capital.

Local variation in the availability of specific organizations, especially in a developing country setting, should make organizational memberships the most locally determined aspect of social capital. Attitudes about generalized others should have the least variation over local context, although even here we expect significant subcultural differences. Some of Putnam's speculations about the differences within Italy were inspired by Banfield's earlier notions of how generalized trust varied from North to South.

Social networks, on the other hand, depend to some extent on the local availability of network contacts, but more on the position of the individual within the local context. Much depends, of course, on what types of contacts one is interested in identifying in a person's

networks. If those contacts are relatively rare or not widely dispersed across society, local context may play a larger role in determining whose networks include those contacts. But if, as is usually the case, one wants to assess whether an individual's networks include generally high status others, then most local contexts provide the possibility of those contacts so access to those others depends more on the individual's position within that local community than on the characteristics of the community.

Similarly, confidence in social institutions may vary across local context depending on the varying performance of those institutions in the local context. But, to the extent these institutions are national institutions with some bureaucratically imposed consistency across local areas, we would expect that the nature of the interactions with those institutions, and thus an individual's confidence in them, would depend more on the position of the individual within the society than on the local variation of the institutions themselves.

Theory and Research on Social Capital

Much research on social capital approaches social capital as either a property of individuals and their social networks or as a feature of the community and the degree of civic engagement and trust among its members. With respect to the first, social capital "is embodied in the relations among persons" (Coleman 1990, 304). The importance of social networks lies in their value as social capital. Social capital is productive to the extent that it creates opportunities or facilitates social exchange that would otherwise not be possible or would be more costly. It is the other in the relationship who provides the advantage (Portes 1998).

Extensive research has documented the connection between social networks and economic outcomes, as well as the potential for social contacts to translate into social capital. Notably, Granovetter's (1973, 1974) "strength of weak ties" theory illustrated the connection

between social contacts and finding a job. The status and quality of the social contact appears to increase wages and occupational prestige (Lin 1999), supporting the argument that who you know is an important factor in explaining economic outcomes. People who have well-placed contacts benefit from the information and influence that these networks ties can provide. And those who hold key positions in low density social networks are advantaged because their position gives them better access to these resources (Burt 1992, 2000).

Social capital as a feature of the community considers the degree of civic engagement and the level of trust that exists among its members. This line of research is most notably associated with Robert Putnam's (2000) *Bowling Alone*. For Putnam, social capital is built up through group members' involvement in voluntary civic organizations. The norms and trust emanating from social organizations serve to facilitate cooperation for the mutual benefit of the group. It follows that the community's associational life can be connected to the governance of the community and its civic virtue. Social capital at this community level has been linked with outcomes such as poverty, health, the economy, and crime (Grootaert et al. 2004).

Of course, individualistic and contextual approaches to social capital can be interpreted as looking at the same phenomenon from two different perspectives. But there is also an important sense in which some aspects of social capital are more determined by characteristics of individuals – their social position in communities of relationships – and other aspects are determined more by characteristics of the community. One of the goals of this research is to demonstrate how these two alternatives can be evaluated empirically with survey data.

Research on social capital in the development literature has constructed a variety of empirical measures reflecting its multi-dimensional nature and has linked these measures with a variety of social outcomes. Several attempts have measured social capital as a function of trust

and membership in associations (Inglehart 1997; Grootaert et al. 2004; Krishna 2002; Onyx and Bullen 1997; Sudarsky 1999). Grootaert, et al (2004) integrated a measure of social networks focusing on three items—size of the network, the internal diversity of the networks as indicated by the economic status of members, and the extent to which the networks provided assistance when needed. Social capital has been linked with the quality of government, levels of crime, and subjective reports of well-being (Narayan and Cassidy 2001), early stages of economic development (Inglehart 1997), political activity and mobilization (Krishna 2002), and household welfare and poverty (Grootaert 2001).

The setting.

India is an enormously diverse country with broad language, religious, geographic, and political variations across its territory. Although there are some suggestions that caste differences have been eclipsed by class differences in modern India (Beteille 1992), most scholars continue to find caste or *jati* to be a significant factor in Indian social stratification system (Srinivas 1996; Gupta 1991). These *jatis* are endogamous with clear boundaries and permeate Indian social life in many ways. Caste or *Jati* shapes the individuals' social relations in many ways. Traditionally ritual distance between *jatis* defined who one may or may not eat with. While this stylized distance is declining in modern India – at least between the upper castes, endogamous marriage and close knit kinship patterns preserve the distance between various *jatis*. Residential segregation in village life makes inter-group relationships difficult to build. Even in urban area, many residential co-operative societies are set up by people from the same community resulting in continuation of traditional distance. A fascinating study in Mumbai slums documents *jati* and language clustering at the level of the streets (Sharma 2000).

For the Scheduled Caste (known popularly as *Dalits*) and the Scheduled Tribe (also called *Adivasi*), the social distance is characterized by a climate of mistrust and fear. The dalits, in particular, are seen as being “impure” because they engage in such occupations as scavenging, curing leather, operating crematoriums etc. Few higher caste Hindus feel comfortable inviting the dalits into their homes and sharing a meal with them and stories about atrocities against the dalits who dare to encroach on the territory of higher castes appear daily in the news papers (Mendelsohn and Vicziany 1998).

Religion impinges upon the Indian social life in a fashion similar to the caste. Following the migration of upper class Muslims to Pakistan in 1947 (Engineer 2001), the Muslim community in India consists disproportionately of urban self employed. Muslims form about 12 percent of the Indian population. Social distance between Hindus and Muslims is vast, exacerbated by political posturing of Hindu fundamentalist political parties. Christians, Jains and Sikhs form about 4 percent of the Indian population. While there is considerable overlap between Jains, Sikhs and Hindus in day to day lives, Christians tend to be outside this circle. Thus, it is not surprising that the social networks and social contacts in India are shaped by caste and religion (Srinivas and Beteille 1964).

If caste and religion dominate Indian life at the micro level, regional variation dominates the Indian civic society at a macro level. India is one of the most heterogeneous countries in the world with tremendous variation across states (Sinha 2005). Even before the conquest and colonization by the East India Company and subsequently the British Crown, Indian states were extremely diverse. But post colonization, a new level of complexity was added to the Indian political structure. Some areas in India were directly governed by the British Empire with residents located in some major cities. Other areas were governed through a civil service and

local landlords responsible to this civil service, still others were ruled as princely states with a variety of local rulers. These diverse structures resulted in a variety of local governance mechanisms which continued in a modified form following the Indian independence in 1947.

India is a republic with clearly articulated division of responsibilities between central, state and local governments. However, even with respect to activities that lie in the purview of the central government, state level bureaucracy is charged with its implementation resulting in tremendous differences between states in infrastructure facilities, spread of banks and other modern institutions, and quality of public services. In some areas villages are small with considerable distance between villages (such as the Himachal Pradesh), in others, villages are very large – over 10,000 individuals – and located close to urban agglomerations (such as in Western Uttar Pradesh). Some states (such as Maharashtra) have well developed road and rail networks, in other states (such as Bihar), transportation networks are very sparse. All these have a strong impact on development of various organizations and institutions. Large villages often have several schools and clinics and doctors, nurses, teachers live in the village. In smaller villages they commute to work from nearby towns. Well developed transportation systems ensure that these professionals come regularly to work, while schools/clinics in areas with poor infrastructure are often closed.

These regional differences in India are reflected in many dimensions of social life resulting in vast differences in school and medical facilities, functioning of government systems, development programs etc. These differences can be seen in vast interstate differences in literacy, school enrollment, infant and child mortality, and utilization of medical services (Desai 1994; Desai and Sreedhar 1999).

We expect that these micro and macro characteristics will shape subjective and objective dimensions of social capital in different ways. Individual characteristics such as caste, religion and education will have greater impact on the subjective and informal dimensions of social capital such as the social networks. In contrast, regional differences will dominate the objective and formal dimensions of social capital.

METHODS

Data.

In 2004-2005, the University of Maryland and the National Council of Applied Economic Research fielded a survey of more than 40,000 households across India. This survey, the “Human Development Profile of India”, includes a wide range of questions about, health, education, employment, income, consumption and gender relations. Several aspects of social capital were included in order to trace the relationship between household education and status with outcomes such as children’s education and access to medical care. These social capital questions form the basis of the results reported here. The survey was translated into twelve languages and administered throughout India – in 32 states and Union Territories – and included urban as well as rural areas. The data collection was funded by grants from the National Institute of Health to the University of Maryland. Results reported in this draft paper are based on provisional data from the survey and, while we expect the final analyses to substantially follow these results, these results should not be quoted or cited until final data are available.

Variables.

Social networks. The social networks component of the survey asks respondents about their ties to three major institutions. Exact question wording is reported in Appendix 1.

Respondents are asked about acquaintances and relatives who worked in medicine, education, and the government. Further questions probed about the closeness of any reported ties, but the analyses reported here focus on the simple presence or absences of any network ties to these three institutions.

Among the households in our preliminary data, 39 percent have ties to schools, 33 percent have ties to the government, and 32 percent have ties to some medical institution. We construct a four category scale of the extent of network ties by counting how many of the three possible ties are reported by the respondent. Even with just three items, the scale has a good estimate of reliability (Cronbach's alpha= 0.72). 42 percent of the households have none of the three network ties; 21 percent have one, 16 percent have two, and 17 percent have all three types of network ties.

Group memberships. Respondents were asked if anybody in the household was a member of any of nine types of organizations: religious, festival or social groups (15%), caste associations (15%), self-help groups (10%), credit and savings associations (8%), women's groups (7%); unions, business or professional associations (5%), youth, sports, or reading groups (4%), co-operatives (4%), or a development non-government organization (NGOs, 2%).

The number of organizational types that the household belonged to were summed to obtain an index of the extent of organizational memberships. The resulting scale had a modest internal consistency (Cronbach's alpha = 0.60), not surprising given the diversity of organizational types. The count of organizational types is highly skewed. Most households (63%) were not members of any organizations. Only 7% were members of three or more types.

Confidence in institutions. Respondents were asked how much confidence they had in ten important institutions in Indian society. They were given choices of "a great deal of

confidence”, “only some confidence”, or “hardly any confidence at all”. Analysis revealed that the principal division was between households who had “a great deal of confidence” and the other two responses. Most confidence was reported for banks (90%) and the military (87%), followed by schools (67%), medicine (63%), courts (55%), newspapers (37%), panchayats (local governing bodies, 33%), the state government (27%), police (22%), and politicians (11%).

A scale was formed of overall confidence in Indian institutions by counting the number of institutions for which the household reported a great deal of confidence. The resulting scale is approximately normally distributed with a mean of 4.9 and a standard deviation of 2.3. The internal consistency is good (Cronbach’s alpha= 0.73).

Trust in people. The fourth type of social capital (see figure 1) we sought to measure was subjective attitudes towards informal contacts, i.e., towards people in general rather than towards specific institutions. Generalized trust has been measured in dozens of surveys around the world with a standard question, “Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in life?” In pre-testing, our respondents had a very difficult time responding to this question. Many had little idea of what we were asking. Others wanted to agree to both ends of the binary question. In fact, agreeing with both ends is not an unreasonable response (e.g., “trust but verify”). We experimented with alternative wordings but were unable to devise a formulation that captured our sense of generalized trust and was understandable to most of our respondents. In the end, we had to abandon this question in order not to put the remainder of the survey at risk.

This “result” suggests that research may need to re-evaluate the widespread use of this question as the standard measure of trust, especially in developing countries with a substantial portion of the sample unfamiliar with opinion polling and often not literate. In any case, for the

analyses reported here, we will be limited to only three cells of our 2x2 formulation of the scope of social capital dimensions.

Household background characteristics. The survey measured households' economic and social position with great care. Economic position was assessed with scales for consumer assets owned, consumer expenditures in the last year, and income in the last year. Each captures a slightly different aspect of economic standing and in many analyses the three measures complement each other. We also include dummy variables for whether the household owns agricultural land, whether it has a non-farm business, and for 11 broad occupational categories that describe the principal income source for the household.

Caste, tribe, and religion are used to distinguish seven different social groups—Brahmins, other Hindu upper castes, other backwards castes, scheduled castes, scheduled tribes, Muslims, and other religions. Caste-like divisions among non-Hindus are ignored.

Educational levels were recorded for each household member; for this paper, we include measures for the highest adult male and highest adult female educational levels in the household.

Contexts. Local contexts are included in the current analysis as state of residence dummy variables. [In later versions of this paper we will include controls for districts and eventually village]. Rural or urban areas are also distinguished.

Analyses.

We regress the three measured types of social capital stepwise on local context and social position. While we are interested also in the details of these results, our main concern is the total relationship with these two sets of variables. Our hypotheses predict that informal and subjective aspects of social capital should have the strongest relationships with an individual's social

position while formal and objective aspects of social capital should have the strongest relationships with informal and subjective aspects of social capital.

RESULTS.

Associations among types of social capital.

Our three measures of social capital are not highly correlated across India. The highest correlation is between the two objective social capital measures, memberships in organizations and social networks ($r=+.11$). With the large sample size, this correlation is significantly greater than 0, but not substantively large. By comparison, the average item to scale correlation (without the item in the scale) is $+.54$ for social networks and $+.32$ for memberships.

Confidence in institutions is *negatively* correlated with both social networks and memberships, although the association is weak ($-.06$ for both networks and memberships). There is a slight tendency for Indian households with better networks and memberships in more types of organizations to have less confidence in Indian institutions than households who are less well connected.

Regressions on local context and social position.

Appendix table 2 reports the coefficients for the stepwise regressions. Our main concern is with the overall associations of each type of social capital with contexts versus the associations with individuals' social positions. Table 1 reports the R-squares for each type of social capital regressed first on urbanization and the state dummies, then on the social position variables, and finally on both sets of variables together.

Table 1. Squared multiple correlations of three social capital measures on context and social position.

	social networks	organization memberships	confidence in institutions
state dummies, urban	0.130	0.190	0.078
social position	0.168	0.024	0.013
total	0.286	0.209	0.082

The results partially support our hypotheses. Informal, objective social capital (networks) is the only form of social capital more closely related to an individual's social position than to his residential context. Wealthy, well-educated, high status households are better networked through informal acquaintances than lower status households. Local context makes a difference too, but not as much as social position.

By contrast, formal, objective social capital (organizational memberships) is far less associated with social position but more closely associated with state and local context. A household's social position is far less important for organizational memberships than its locational context. This is consistent with the interpretation that what matters most for organizational memberships is whether these organizations exist in the local community. The presence of these organizations varies greatly over local areas so the primary determinant of memberships is geographic location. The low association with social position may be somewhat surprising, but several types of organizations on the survey list target members of all social positions so this result may be a function of the organizational types included in the survey.

Confidence in local institutions also varies mostly by local context, although somewhat less so than memberships in formal organizations. Again, however, social position seems to be fairly unimportant in determining one's attitudes towards these institutions. This is consistent with the interpretation that the performance of these local institutions (police, politicians, schools) varies across localities so confidence also varies across localities. It might be also that local cultures of cynicism vary by locality independently of the performance of those institutions, but it is not clear what other local conditions might determine confidence levels besides the qualities of those institutions themselves.

DISCUSSION

The results support our hypothesis that informal social capital will be more closely associated with individuals' social position and formal social capital will be more closely associated with the social context of the individual. In India, both organizational memberships and confidence in institutions are more closely associated with the state and urbanization of one's residence than with one's social position. The availability of formal social institutions often varies dramatically across communities so where one resides will often be the major determinant of linkages with these formal institutions.

Informal networks, however, are more universally available, so access to these networks is more likely determined by the individuals' characteristics, especially their local social status. Thus, in India, the social networks scale is strongly related to household wealth, education, and caste position. It is also related to context – where one lives – but only modestly when compared to the importance of social position or when compared to the importance of locational context for formal social capital.

On the other hand, we found no support for our hypothesis that subjective social capital will be more closely associated with the individual than with the individual's social context. We were handicapped somewhat in evaluating this hypothesis by not being able to construct a generalized trust question (subjective, informal social capital). Nevertheless, among formal social capital, subjective confidence in institutions was less associated with both locational context and social position than was objective membership in organizations. The membership scale had a lower internal reliability than the confidence scale so it is difficult to interpret these

low associations of institutional confidence with more measurement error for the confidence scale.

Finally, our problems with constructing a generalized trust question need further scrutiny. The question we tried to administer is one of the most widely used public opinion items around the world. Our difficulties suggest that continued rote usage of this item deserves further research into what the respondents actually understand by the question and their answers.

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