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How Do Network Size, Voluntary Association, and Trust Affect Civic Engagement? Evidence from the Asian Barometer Survey

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of social capital in shaping the individual likelihood of "civic engagement" defined specifically as informal and formal political participation. Based on a subset of the Asian Barometer Survey of Democracy, Governance and Development (2006), a representative cross-national dataset, it examines how and to what extent network size, voluntary association, generalized trust, and particularized trust differentially influence the political behaviors of the survey participants in Korea. The dependent variable is measured in terms of first, discussing political topics in an informal social context and, second, getting together with others in order to raise a political issue or sign a petition. Four independent variables are measured: 1) the size of egocentric network; 2) the membership in voluntary organizations and formal groups; 3) the degree of trust placed in generalized others (i.e., strangers); and 4) the extent to which survey respondents place their trust in particularized others (those with whom one has a personal relationship). Quantitative analyses show that, ceteris paribus, network size and voluntary association have a strong causal impact on both outcome variables. Generalized trust is found to be a non-significant factor, however, while particularized trust has a contingent effect. Along with the interpretation of statistical results, their broad theoretical implications are also discussed.

KEYWORDS

Civic Engagement; Network Size; Social Trust; Voluntary Organization; Asia

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