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Empowerment as a Positive-Sum Game

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June 2004**

1. Efficiency, Redistribution and Empowerment

The central concept of economic theory is *efficiency*. Policies and behaviors are evaluated in terms of whether they add more value than they subtract. A “Pareto efficient” change is one which makes at least some people better off, without making anyone else worse off. Pareto efficiency is a very demanding criteria, therefore, and its use would lead to an extreme status quo bias toward maintaining existing policies. In practice, economists typically assess policies and actions in terms of “potential Pareto efficiency”: by this criterion, a policy change is efficient if the sum of the gains to those benefiting exceed the sum of the losses by those made worse off from the change. In either case, economists emphasize positive-sum games: identifying and advocating policies that add more value to society than they subtract.

Other social sciences, including political science and sociology, place a much greater emphasis on the concept of *power*. In contrast to efficiency, an emphasis on power leads inevitably to zero-sum analyses of social policy and behavior. If women’s decision making power within households increases, men’s decreases. If the poor’s representation in political life increases, the representation of the non-poor declines. If one nation’s military power increases, its rivals’ ability to conquer it or to defend themselves decreases.

A zero-sum approach to empowering the poor envisions making the poor better off by moving from one point on a social welfare function to another, such as from A to B in Figure 1, in which the poor’s utility increases at the expense of the non-poor. A positive-sum approach is represented by a move from A to C, from one social welfare

function to a higher one, in which the utility of the poor increases while that of the non-poor is also increased or at worst unchanged.

The term “empowerment” is used with various meanings. The definition adopted here is from the World Bank’s *Empowerment and Poverty Reduction: a Sourcebook* (Narayan, 2002). Empowerment is “the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control, and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.” Empowerment increases “one’s authority and control over the resources and decisions that affect one’s life.” This definition is useful, because it does not conflate hypothesized causes with their effects. In other words, empowering the poor does not necessarily make them better off, it simply implies that their capacity to make themselves better off is enhanced.

In most cases, strengthening the political voice of poor people is likely to make them better off. Macroeconomic policy is one area, however, in which greater political voice for the poor is sometimes thought to have perverse effects on their welfare. Political parties and other forces claiming to represent the poor often advocate looser control of the money supply, as inflation erodes the value of debt. However, studies have shown that the poor are disproportionately harmed by high inflation (Easterly and Fischer, 2001), in part because the financial assets of the wealthy are more likely to be indexed to inflation. Limited understanding of macroeconomic processes can make voters vulnerable to manipulation by politicians inducing them to support policies that often make them worse off. This possibility is one justification for establishing independent central banks and giving technocrats who are relatively immune to political pressures responsibility for macroeconomic and fiscal policy. Such solutions are not

likely to be sustainable in the long run, however, without disseminating information about the effects of different policies to the poor and their representatives. Building popular support for reform through education and through identifying and developing compensatory mechanisms where appropriate will often be required to achieve the social consensus need to carry through difficult reforms, such as reducing spending in the face of fiscal crises (Narayan, 2002: 6, 43).

Enfranchisement of the poor was opposed by most leading 19th century political philosophers on grounds that it would produce economically ruinous “leveling.” However, the poor were eventually enfranchised, in large part because elites began to realize that predictable levels of redistribution resulting from universal suffrage were less damaging than the prospect of unpredictable redistribution associated with political and social instability (Acemoglu and Robinson, 2000).

Empowerment of the poor, therefore, not only may sometimes make the poor worse off – particularly where poor information can be exploited by opportunistic leaders – it sometimes can make the non-poor better off. In the former case, empowerment is inefficient, i.e. a negative-sum game. In other cases, it is a zero-sum game, as the poor can benefit only at the expense of someone else. But in many cases, it can be positive-sum, and these opportunities should be identified and pursued by reformers. Attempts by donor organizations and NGOs to empower the poor should focus on means by which the poor are likely to be made better off without making others worse off. Not only is this approach consistent with efficiency, it will also often be the only politically feasible way to empower the poor. If the non-poor currently have all of the power, then their

cooperation will be necessary to implement economic, political and social reforms that empower the poor – just as in 19th century Great Britain.

Within the two broad categories of economic rights and political rights, the remainder of this chapter identifies specific areas in which the poor can be empowered without disempowering a substantial number of the non-poor. Existing inefficient sets of rights will almost always have some constituency that will suffer when rights are expanded or redistributed, so reform will not be Pareto efficient in the sense of making no one worse off. But often the “losers” from such reforms constitute only a small, well-organized group, such as a repressive governing regime or dominant minority clan or ethnic group, so that reform can easily pass the criterion of potential Pareto efficiency.

Table 1 illustrates the argument in brief. A zero-sum approach to empowering the poor through increasing their economic rights might focus on the distribution of assets or rights between the rich (or middle class) and the poor. An effective positive-sum approach, that is shown by the evidence to improve the well-being of all economic classes in most instances, is to improve the security of property rights and contract enforceability. This issue is addressed in section 2 of this chapter.

A zero-sum approach to political rights might focus on increasing the political representation of the poor relative to that of the rich. For example, voting turnout rates for the poor could be increased, potentially electing more representatives reflecting their interests rather than the interests of the non-poor.¹ To the extent that money can influence election outcomes, campaign finance reform and the secret ballot are two means of preventing the non-poor from dominating political processes. Public financing

¹ Hill and Leighley (1992) find that in the U.S., states in which the poor are better represented at the polls offer more generous means-tested social assistance.

of parties and campaigns might reduce the ability of the well-off to influence poor voters to vote for candidates that do not represent their interests. The secret ballot prevents vote-buying by moneyed interests, since it undermines the credibility of voters' promises to vote for a particular candidate in exchange for a bribe.

In contrast, a positive-sum approach to political reform examines the nature of political participation, and the types of demands and expectations voters have of political candidates and public officials. In particular, where voters' exercise of political voice tends to focus on private goods – patronage, in effect – rather than on broader public policies, outcomes tend to be far less efficient. Efficient and responsive government requires that citizens overcome a large-scale collective problem, by which individual voters face insufficient incentives to articulate their preferences for public goods, and to monitor the performance of public officials and exercise voice (through voting and other means) when needed to hold them accountable to broad public interests. This point is developed empirically in section 3.

Table 1

	<i>positive sum</i>	<i>zero sum</i>
<i>Economic rights</i>	Security of property rights	Distribution of rights
<i>Political rights</i>	Nature of accountability relationships	Relative participation levels

2. Empowerment Through Property and Contract Rights

Does effective protection of property rights benefit primarily the rich? It is now widely accepted that nations with more secure property rights and effective contract enforcement tend to exhibit stronger economic performance (e.g. North, 1991; Knack and

Keefer, 1995). What remains less clear to many, however, is whether secure property rights and effective contract enforcement empower the poor. Neo-Marxist and other radical traditions view them as benefiting the rich at the expense of the poor. This perception is based on the intuition that the poor have little property to protect, unlike rich landowners or capitalists. Similarly, contractual agreements can be perceived as being the product of unequal bargaining power, with rich creditors, landowners or capitalists enforcing contract provisions against poor borrowers, tenants, employees, or consumers. If wealthy elites write the laws and commercial codes and select the judges, legal systems may mostly protect the interests of the well-off, often at the poor's expense. Privatization of communal lands without sufficient compensation has in some instances disempowered rural poor people in Africa and Latin America.

Most donor agencies, however, have recently come around to the view that enforcement of property and contract rights is more often pro-poor, not only by encouraging growth in per capita incomes that are typically accompanied by reductions in poverty (e.g. Squire, 1993), but also through favorable shifts in the distribution of income. This view holds that institutions for promoting secure property rights and enforcement of contracts can have powerful egalitarian effects, enabling individuals with little property and no political connections to invest in human capital and in small enterprises. Fair and transparent procedures for property, contracts, and government regulation of business facilitate the entry of informal sector entrepreneurs and workers--most of whom are low- or middle-income--into the formal sector, and promote the accumulation of physical and human capital, raising profits and wages (de Soto, 1989).²

² According to the World Development Report 2000, "in Ghana in 1993 an investor had to obtain 24 administrative approvals for 24 services before starting any activity—around two years of procedural

Predictability of rights and policies—even those seemingly biased towards the rich—carries enormous advantages relative to less secure economic environments. Strong and predictable property and contract rights are necessary for the emergence of well-developed financial markets³, which are at least as important for poor and middle-income borrowers as for the well off, who can more easily arrange alternative sources of credit. Unlike the rich, the poor may be dependent on credit for acquiring secondary-level education, which has a high cost in terms of forgone income in developing countries.

There is some evidence that government expenditures are diverted away from services that benefit the poor in more corrupt nations (Mauro, 1998). Capital-intensive projects tend to offer more opportunities for kickbacks than health and education spending.

To the extent government incompetence and corruption undermines public service delivery, the poor may be disproportionately affected, because they are more dependent on publicly-provided health services and education. Similarly, the poor are less able to purchase private substitutes (security guards, alarm systems, etc.) for police services.

If bribe seekers can price discriminate, corruption may not disproportionately tax the poor. Kaufmann, Zoido-Lobaton and Lee (2000) present survey evidence from Ecuador that bribe payments to government officials constitute a larger share of firm revenues for small than for large firms. However, this is not a general finding from these firm surveys, according to one of the authors of the Ecuador study. For example, large and small firms pay about the same share of revenues in the form of bribes in Cambodia.

approval, with an uncertain outcome.”

³ Feder et al. (1988) found that formal title to their land (controlling for other factors) improved farmers’

On the other hand, household surveys consistently indicate that poorer families pay a larger share of their incomes as bribes in exchange for public services⁴ -- indicating that price discrimination is more difficult with households than with firms, and/or that poorer households are more dependent than richer households on public services.

Cross-country evidence can be useful in examining whether corruption and uncertain protection of property and contract rights disproportionately harm the poor. One way to address the question is by breaking it into two parts and noting, for example, that property rights are significantly related to growth (e.g. Knack and Keefer, 1995), and that growth is associated with reductions in poverty rates (e.g., Squire, 1993). Thus, one might conclude, secure property rights must make the poor better off. However, it is conceivable that the source of growth matters: most episodes of growth are accompanied by reductions in poverty, but the exceptions could be those in which, for example, growth is generated by secure and stable property and contract rights rather than by public investments in primary or secondary education, health or infrastructure. It is therefore worth presenting more direct evidence.

For this purpose, Knack (2002a) obtained data on income share by quintile from the “high quality” subset of the Deininger and Squire (1996) time-series compilation in inequality. Average annual growth in per capita income was computed for each of the five income quintiles for the same period, using the purchasing power-adjusted income data from Summers and Heston (1991). Barro-type growth regressions were run for each of the five quintiles, using the property rights indexes constructed by Knack and Keefer (1995) from International Country Risk Guide (ICRG) and Business Environmental Risk

access to credit.

⁴ This information was provided in personal correspondence from Young Lee.

Intelligence data.

Depending on the period examined, and on which property rights index was used, the impact of property rights on growth was at worst neutral across the five quintiles, and at best double the impact for the bottom quintile as for the top quintile (Knack, 2002a). These findings strongly indicate that more secure property and contract rights improve incomes for all groups, not merely for those who have the most property in need of protection.

Evidence showing that corruption reduces incomes for all income classes, and particularly for the poor, implies that empowering people in ways that reduce corruption are positive-sum policies. One example is increased representation of women in politics and public office, which is usually advocated on grounds that it will make women and children better off, by re-allocating resources toward public programs that tend to benefit them instead of men. However, a side benefit of increasing women's share of parliamentary seats and high ministerial positions is that it is associated with significant reductions in corruption (Swamy et al., 2001). Because corruption in turn is linked to growth, enhancing women's representation can improve well-being for both women and men – even though men's share of high-level government positions falls.

Mancur Olson (1994) has argued that much of the poverty in the developing world is the product of institutions chosen by politically connected individuals and groups, who tend to be well off, in their own interests. Olson claims that the legal and other governmental institutions that best ensure property rights and contract enforceability are the very same set of institutions that best improve the welfare of the poor. Results described in this section support Olson's view--and the consensus but

largely untested view of the major donor institutions--that good governance not only reduces poverty rates but also improves (or at the least does not worsen) income inequality. Improving the quality of governance is not the only way, and may or may not be the most effective way, of empowering the poor or of reducing poverty. However, there is no evidence that an efficiency/equity tradeoff predominates in strengthening property and contract rights in developing countries. To the contrary, the enormous gains in material welfare of institutional reform appear to benefit the poor at least as much as they benefit other classes.

3. Citizen Voice and Clientilistic vs. Programmatic Politics

Putnam (1993: 101) found that in the more civic regions of Italy, citizen-initiated contacts with government officials tend to concern public issues, while in the less civic regions, such contacts “overwhelmingly involve requests for jobs and patronage.” In the more civic regions, citizens view government as a provider of necessary public goods from which everyone benefits, while citizens of less civic regions view government as a source of private goods.

Banfield (1958) provides a fascinating case study of one of the less civic towns of southern Italy, in which collective action failures on the part of the citizenry resulted in an indifferent and corrupt government. Collective action in the public interest could not be organized, because it depended on unselfish inducements, and a degree of interpersonal trust and organizational loyalty that did not exist in the town, where many villagers found “the idea of public-spiritedness unintelligible” (p. 18). Despite widespread dissatisfaction at the lack of a local hospital or public transportation to a

middle school in a nearby town, there was “no organized effort to bring pressure to bear on the government” (p. 31). The only voluntary association in the town, comprised of 25 upper-class men, engaged solely in social activities for the members, and did not involve itself in community affairs. There were few checks on public officials, because it was not in the narrow self-interest of citizens to get involved: “For a private citizen to take a serious interest in a public problem” was “regarded as abnormal and even improper.” On the other hand, it was considered normal to lobby officials to provide personal favors (p. 87). Voter choices were not based on class, ideology, or the public interest, but simply rewarded the party providing jobs or other particularistic favors.⁵

Empowering individual poor people, therefore, by making it easier for them to vote or to contact public officials, will not necessarily make them collectively better off, if they use this new-found voice to more effectively demand patronage. Even nominally pro-poor programs that take the form of targeted redistribution -- such as free food or temporary employment in public works -- may have less impact on welfare than cheaper and broader-based programs to improve basic health and education services (Keefer and Khemani, 2003). Efficient choice of public policies and effective provision of public goods – for most of the poor and non-poor alike -- requires changes in information, electoral rules or social norms that alter incentives of voter and politicians to indulge in patronage practices.

Cross-country evidence on this problem is provided by several questions included in a Gallup International survey administered to more than 30,000 respondents in 45

⁵ See Knack (2002a) and Boix and Posner (1998) for additional arguments and evidence on the relationship between “social capital” and government performance.

countries in August, 2002.⁶ Only 13.9% of respondents said that they had contacted a public official (local or national) in the past year to provide their opinion on a broad public issue, while 22.4% replied that they had contacted a public official for help with a problem affecting them or their family (this is termed “particularized contacting” in the political science literature; see Verba and Nie, 1972). There is enormous variation across countries; for example only 6% of Japanese respondents contacted public officials about personal problems, compared to 64% for Cameroonians. Only 5% of respondents in Argentina, compared to 36% in the USA, contacted public officials to provide an opinion on broader public issues. The share of all contacts that are programmatic rather than clientilistic varies from a low of 17% for Russia to a high of 57% for the USA and 59% for Croatia. Figure 2 plots in two dimensions the percentage of respondents for each country who report each type of contact.

These cross-country differences appear to have enormous consequences for the quality of governance. Figure 3 plots on the horizontal axis the percentage of all contacts that are of the programmatic sort. The vertical axis plots countries’ scores on a “Control of Corruption index from Kaufmann et al. (1999). Countries in which contacts tend to be public-interested have significantly higher scores – i.e. less corruption -- on the Control of Corruption index (correlation = .43, significant at .004). The relationship is similar for another index from Kaufmann et al. (1999) on “Government Effectiveness” (correlation = .38, significant at .01).

The Kaufmann et al. (1999) indexes are based primarily on perceptions of experts and investors. Results are similar, however, using measures of government performance in the Gallup survey. Respondents were asked whether their country – and their local

⁶ See Appendix, questions 1-4.

community, in a similar question – was “run by a few big interests looking out for themselves” or “for the benefit of all the people.” In countries where contacts tend to be of the public-interested type, fewer respondents replied that their country was run by a few big interests (correlation = $-.37$, significant at $.01$). The relationship with respondents’ perceptions of capture by “a few big interests” at the local level was even stronger (correlation = $-.47$, significant at $.001$); see Figure 4.

The nature of citizens’ interactions with elected and appointed officials may be deeply entrenched and difficult to alter. However, there is some potential for donor-assisted change. First, improved information about policies, the behavior of officials, and their relation to outcomes can change incentives facing both voters and politicians (Besley and Burgess, 2003; Keefer and Khemani, 2003; Stromberg, 2001). Voters can observe for themselves the private or narrowly-targeted public goods (e.g. local school buildings, and jobs to construct and staff them) they receive from officials, and reward them at the polls. Much more information, and the ability to process it, is often required to credit or blame officials appropriately for their role in providing or failing to provide quality public services. Greater literacy, access to free and independent media, and enhanced transparency of government decision making can help improve citizens’ ability to demand improved policies and services with respect to broad public goods, and to monitor and sanction poor performance.

Political institutions also matter. Keefer (2002) argues that the age of democracy is important. In relatively new democracies, parties have had less time to build policy reputations, and candidates are unlikely to be able to make credible promises to all voters. Candidates therefore cannot win votes effectively by promising to provide broad public

goods, such as higher-quality health and education services. Instead, they rely on targeted promises to specific individuals or groups to whom they can make credible promises (because of past dealings or ethnic loyalties). Figure 5 shows that the percentage of contacts with public officials that are public-interest rises in more established democracies (age of democracy is on the horizontal axis), where reputation effects make promises more credible, allowing candidates to compete on (and voters to reward them for) providing broader public goods. Contacting of both types is significantly lower in countries with closed-list proportional representation systems, where voters are in effect selecting only parties, not individual candidates.

Interestingly, in some countries where clientilism prevailed in some regions, ideologically-based parties effectively competed in other regions, with positive effects on provision of public services. Examples include Communist parties in Emilia-Romagna (Italy) and in Kerala (India).

Social capital, namely of the “bridging” sort, also contributes to better provision of broad-based and effective public services benefiting the poor. Where citizens trust each other to cooperate for the common good, they are more likely to make public-interested contacts, but are no more likely to engage in particularized contacting. Figure 6 depicts the cross-country relationship between the percentage of Gallup survey respondents who agree that “most people can be trusted” and the public-interested share of all contacts with officials. Building social capital is an enormous challenge, but improving education, communications and transportation potentially can broaden the perspective of citizens and facilitate experience, understanding and compromise across regions, ethnic groups, and even income classes, encouraging the growth of broad-based

movements and organizations that monitor the efficiency and integrity of government. Donors must be careful, however, not to distort the functioning, membership and goals of individual civil society organizations by flooding them with resources (Gugerty and Kremer, 2002).

4. Implications for Measuring Empowerment

Empowerment of the poor and other disadvantaged groups – the less educated, rural, women, and members of certain ethnic groups – can be measured in part through data collected by government and donor agencies on literacy and relative schooling for example. Some aspects of empowerment, such as sense of political efficacy, different forms of political participation, and information regarding politics and public issues, are not captured very well in the standard data. Nationally-representative surveys conducted by cross-country networks, such as Gallup International, Afrobarometer, Latinobarometer, or the World Values Surveys, are potentially useful means of collecting such data. Of these networks, Gallup’s annual “Voice of the People” survey is unique in allowing organizations to purchase space for questions. The August 2002 Gallup survey results used in this chapter suggest that such surveys produce reasonably valid and useful data. Demographic variables included in the surveys would readily permit comparison between the poor and non-poor of (for example) level of political information, efficacy, participation rates, satisfaction with various public services, etc., were questions on those topics to be added to the survey.⁷ The appendix provides a list of possible questions. Further thought is needed regarding questions on information that would be applicable to respondents in countries with differing political systems and salient public issues.

⁷ See appendix, questions 5-17, for possible ways of asking about these issues.

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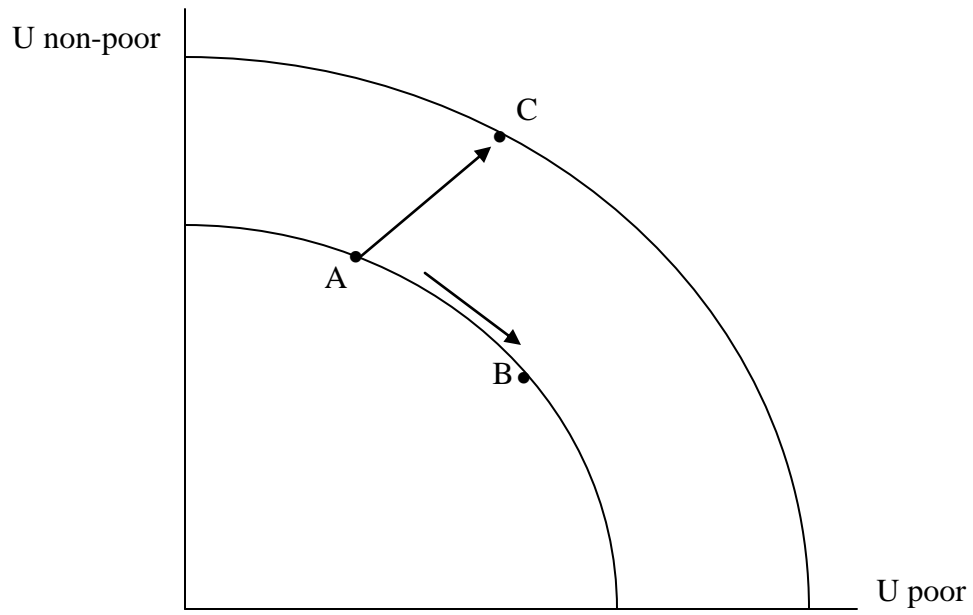
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Zero-sum vs Positive-sum "Empowerment"

Figure 1

Contacting on public & personal problems

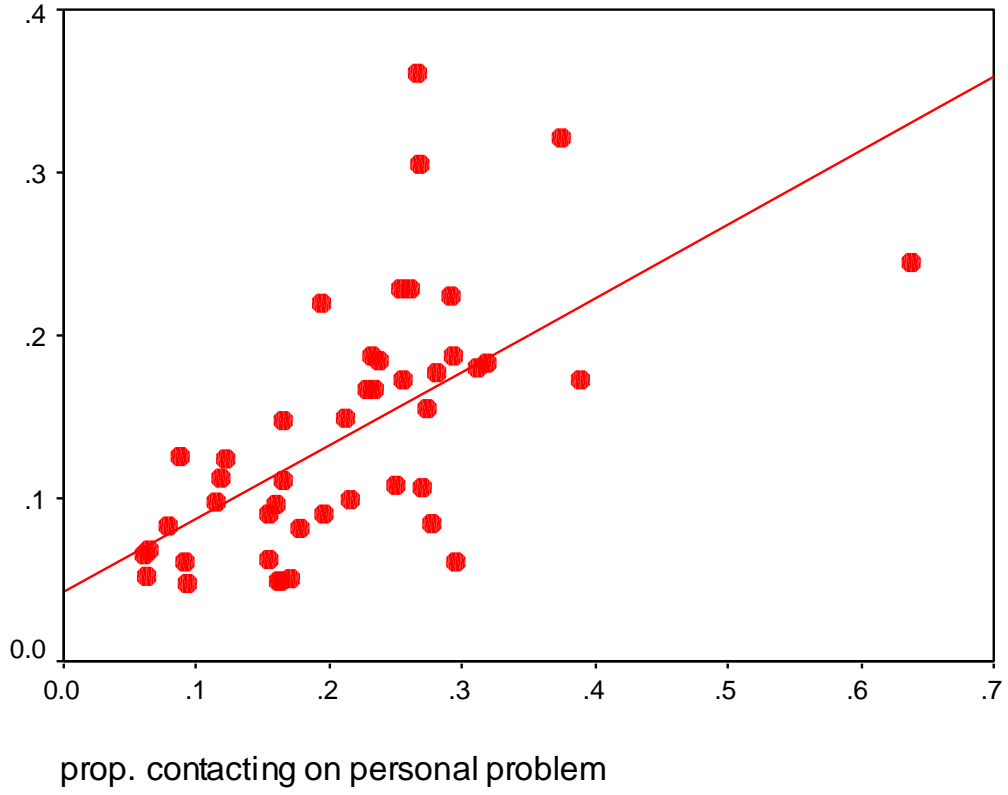


Figure 2

Control of corruption & contacting officials

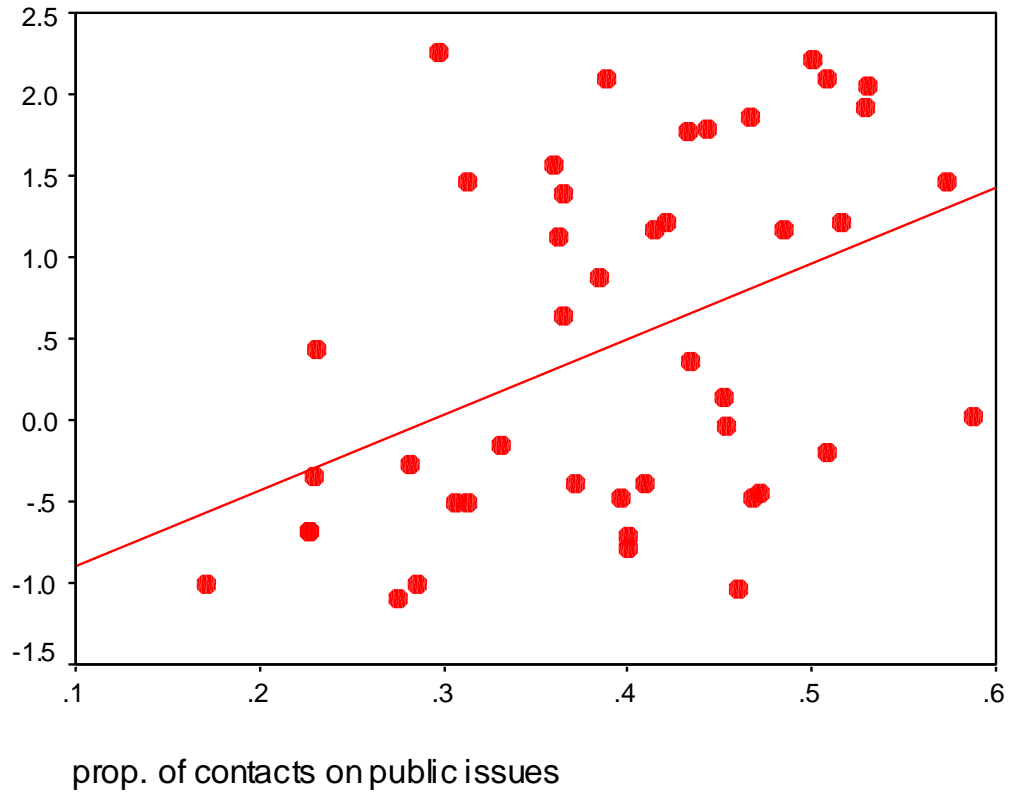


Figure 3

Local capture & contacting officials

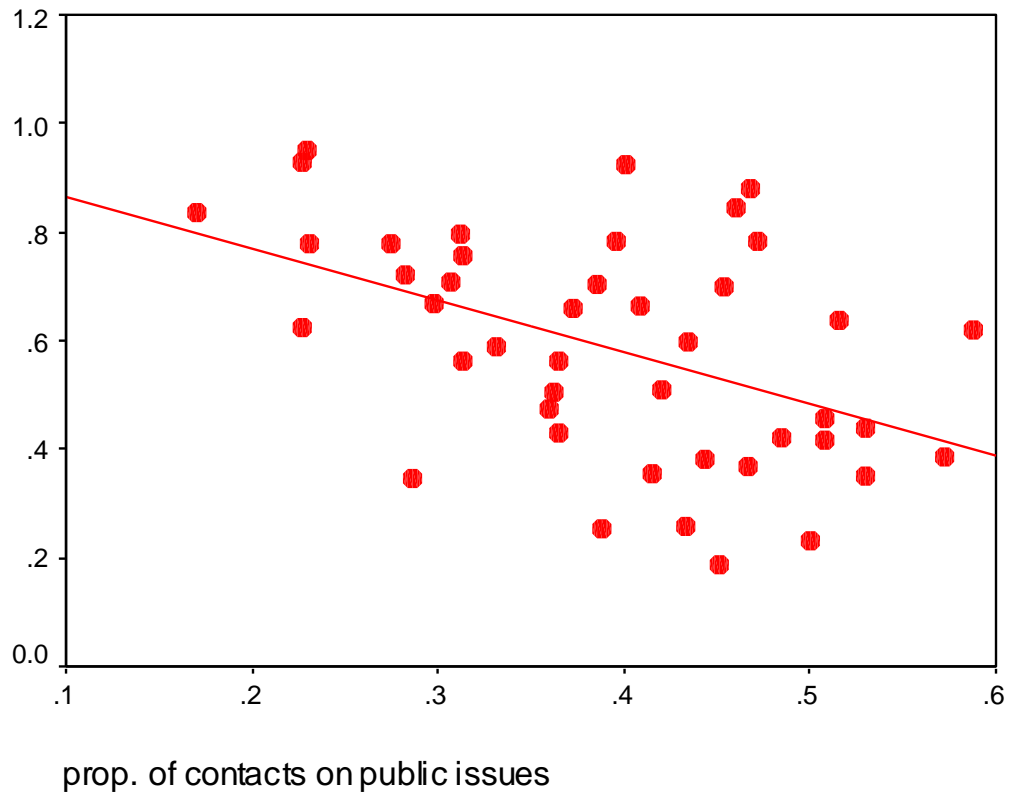


Figure 4

Age of democracy and contacting

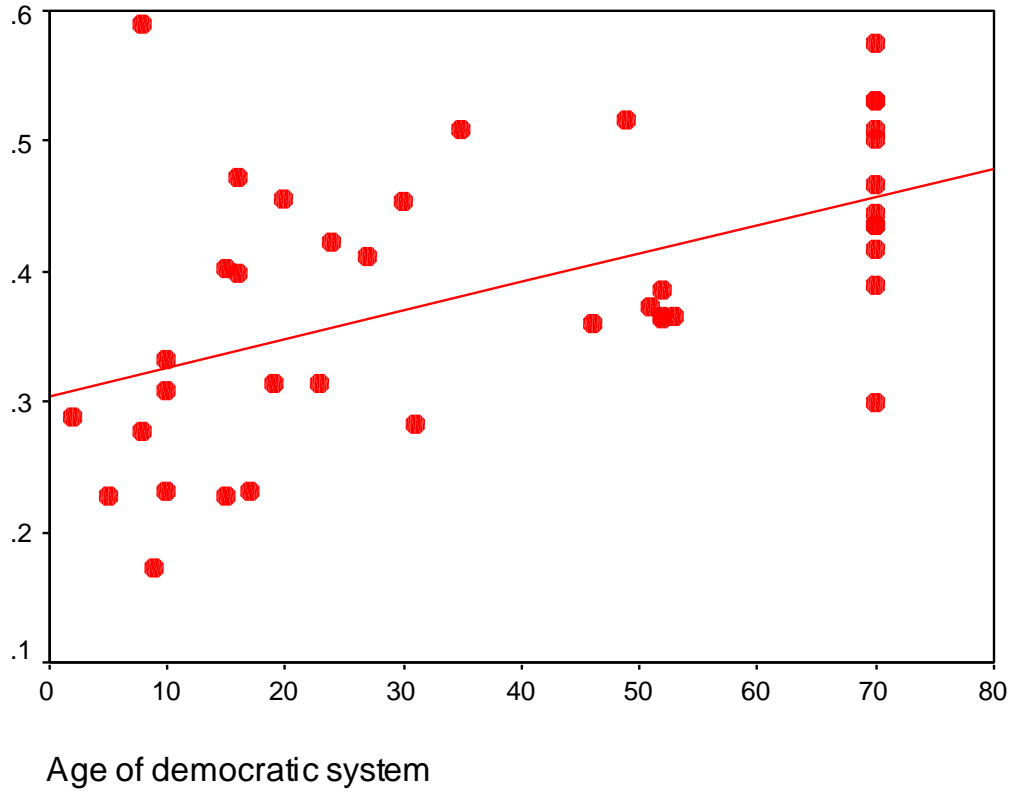


Figure 5

Interpersonal trust & contacting officials

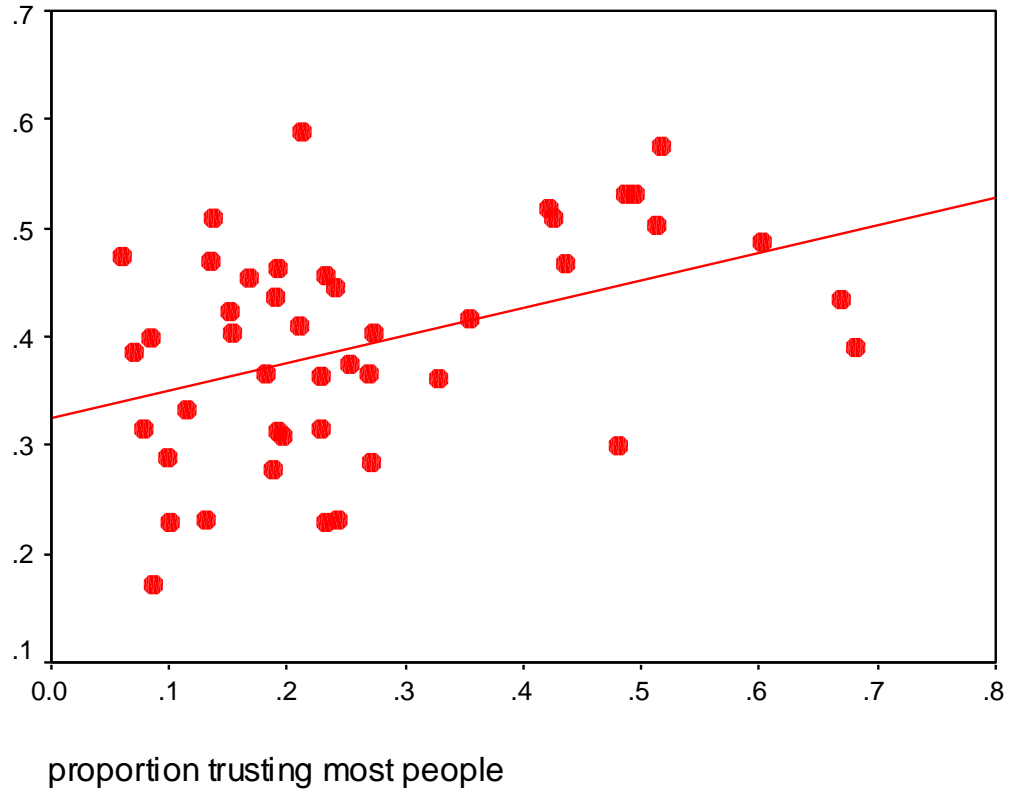


Figure 6

Appendix: Survey measures of empowerment

Included in August 2002 Gallup International “Voice of the People” Survey:

1. Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? (Gallup International, 2002; World Values Surveys, 1995)

Most people can be trusted

Can't be too careful

Don't know

It depends (volunteered)

2. Generally speaking, would you say that this country is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, or that it is run for the benefit of all the people? (Gallup International, 2002; World Values Surveys, 1995)

Run by a few big interests

Run for all the people

Don't know

3. Generally speaking, would you say that your local government is run by a few big interests looking out for themselves, or that it is run for the benefit of all the people? (Gallup International, 2002)

Run by a few big interests

Run for all the people

Don't know

4. Have you contacted any public officials (either local or national) in the last year, either for help with a problem affecting you and your family, or to provide your opinion on a broader public issue? (Gallup International, 2002)

[Mark all that apply]

For help with a problem

To provide my opinion on a public issue

Yes (on something else—volunteered)

No

Not included in August 2002 Gallup International “Voice of the People” Survey:

5. I’m going to read out some forms of political action that people can take, and I’d like you to tell me, for each one, whether you have actually done any of these things, whether you might do it or would never, under any circumstances, do it. (from World Values Surveys, 1995)

- Signing a petition
- Joining in boycotts
- Attending lawful demonstrations
- Joining unofficial strikes
- Occupying buildings or factories

6. How would you rank the importance of the following activities as part of the job of members of the national legislature:

- Helping people in their districts who request favors or help with personal problems
- Making sure their districts gets their fair share of government money and projects
- Working on issues affecting the nation as a whole

7. How would you rank the importance of the following reasons for preferring one political party over another?

- a. The policies that the parties advocate affecting the nation as a whole
- b. The share of government money and projects going to the part of the country in which you live
- c. The help you or your family may get if you need a favor or help with a personal problem

8. Which statement do you feel is closer to the way things really are: with enough effort we can wipe out political corruption OR it is difficult for people to have much control over the things politicians do in office.

9. How much do political parties help make the government pay attention to what the people think: a good deal, some or not much?

10. How much do elections make government pay attention to what the people think: a good deal, some or not much?

11. How much does having interest groups make government pay attention to what the people think: a good deal, some or not much?

12. Do you think that the parties pretty much keep their campaign promises or do they usually do what they want after the election is over?

13. Have you encountered any of these problems with your local public schools during the past 12 months? (Mark all that apply)

No textbooks or other supplies

Poor teaching

Frequent and unjustified absence of teachers

Overcrowded classrooms

Facilities in poor condition

Illegal payments required

No experience with public schools in last 12 months

None of the above

14. Have you encountered any of these problems with your local public clinic or hospital during the past 12 months? (Mark all that apply)

Frequent and unjustified absence of doctors

Treated disrespectfully by staff

No drugs available

Long waiting times

Facilities not clean

Illegal payments required

No experience with public clinic/hospital in last 12 months

None of the above