

KNOWLEDGE, SOCIAL CAPITAL AND THE SUSTAINABLE WELFARE STATE: REPORT ON RESEARCH PROGRESS AND ITS APPLICATION TO COLLEGE TEACHING

HENRY MILNER, VANIER COLLEGE, PROFESSEUR ASSOCIÉ, UNIVERSITÉ LAVAL
VISITING FELLOW, SCHOOL OF POLICY STUDIES, QUEEN'S UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT

This comparative research program (SSHRC & FCAR) examines the relationship between institutions and political information in mature democracies. In that work I have sought to incorporate rational-choice institutionalist analysis to explain the more egalitarian outcomes achieved by social-democratic welfare states. The explanation hinges on reduced information costs being attained through the workings of institutional arrangements in the economic, political and cultural arenas of organized action. Institutional arrangements in these three categories - as they have developed in Scandinavian and other advanced welfare states - are hypothesized to enhance the ability of individuals to make choices that reinforce the capacity of the requisite institutions to provide a suitable framework for policies resulting in the societal outcomes they favour. I shall discuss how my experience can be applied pedagogically at the Cegep level by describing the course in "Conducting Research in the Social Sciences".

"I find television very educational — every time it's turned on, I go into another room and read a book"

Groucho Marx

INTRODUCTION

My theoretical work on the relationship between institutions and outcomes in Western democracies has come to centre on the costs of information under different systems of institutional arrangements. Out of this work comes the argument underlying my present research agenda. To put it succinctly: sustainable welfare states are seen to have developed a series of institutions that reduce the cost of acquiring knowledge needed for effective citizenship. These institutions enhance the citizens' ability to make choices that reinforce the system's capacity to carry out policies resulting in the societal outcomes they rationally favour, outcomes associated with the sustainable welfare state. I have developed that argument in previous publications (Milner, 1994; 1996), and briefly summarize it in the first part of this paper.

The main body of this paper is based on ongoing research seeking to identify the *political* institutions that reduce the cost of acquiring the knowledge needed for effective citizenship thus enhancing "civic literacy." I explore the possibility of a causal relationship between a more informed population and the existence of proportionally (PR) elected legislatures and councils, especially when these are combined with institutional arrangements that foster linkages between political organization at municipal, regional, national, and supranational levels. Under such systems - termed consensual (building on Lijphart, 1984) - political actors are hypothesized to have greater incentives (benefits) and face fewer institutional obstacles (costs) to supplying political information (Milner, 1997).

One objective of my current efforts is to test this hypothesis, using existing survey data to compare levels of political knowledge in countries with consensual and non-consensual (majoritarian) political institutions. In this paper, I shall be drawing on this exploration; but, as should come as no surprise, only limited data on political knowledge suitable for comparative analysis is available (Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996). For example, the CSES (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems) group (Rosenstone, 1995), had originally intended to compare knowledge about politics in its samples of the population in 50 countries by asking the same questions in each, but in the end decided to abandon the idea.

To complement these direct, factual indicators of political knowledge, level of voting turnout is used as an indirect indicator of such knowledge. I argue that if the cost of political information is indeed lower under consensual institutional arrangements, we should expect it to be manifested in higher levels of voting turnout - since we know that informed citizens participate more. The logic is similar, as we shall see, to that of Putnam who uses electoral turnout as one indicator of social capital.

The connection between electoral systems and voting turnout has been well established. Proportional electoral systems boost turnout to a significant extent, a boost Lijphart, (1997) estimates at between 9 and 12 percent. The usual explanation for this association is that under PR all votes count, whereas this is not the case in many electoral dis-

tricts under first-past-the-post. And indeed, turnout tends to be higher where elections are close. But looking at such evidence, students of voting behavior such as Aldrich ask why it should make any difference. It cannot be simply that the voter perceives an increased chance of affecting the outcome since, in reality, the voter's likelihood of affecting the outcome remains minuscule. There must be an indirect effect, he argues, and it emerges from the well known fact that parties invest more effort and money the more the outcome is in doubt (Aldrich, 1993). But if this is the case, then it is on the supply of information side that at least part of the explanation lies, and this is exactly the line of argument being followed here.

To develop this argument, comparative data on turnout in national elections will be supplemented by comparative local voting data. With the partial exception of one study (Morlan, 1984), existing comparative analyses of voting turnout are restricted to national election results. Since our conceptualization of consensual political institutions incorporates the dimension of structural continuity, that is the link between political organization at different levels, turnout in local elections emerges as the best test of our hypothesis of lower information cost under consensual than majoritarian institutions (Milner, 1997). Moreover, it seems reasonable to suggest that the information related to higher local turnout is generally more a product of deeply ingrained background levels of political information than of a short-lived, high-visibility national campaign. The data I have been gathering on turnout in local elections, both aggregate national data, as well as detailed data from countries using more than one electoral system at the local level - Switzerland is the best example - appear to confirm the expectation that the turnout boost associated with PR is even greater in local elections. But due to its incompleteness, in this paper I limit myself to national turnout statistics.

These and other statistics that are presented below are illustrative of an argument that this paper advances as a contribution to our understanding of the factors underlying desirable and desired policy outcomes, outcomes identified with the sustainable welfare state (SWS). This argument focuses on a factor I have chosen to term "civic literacy:" that civic literacy serves as a key link between consensual political institutions and the sustainable welfare state.

I attempt to show why the concept of civic literacy is likely to prove most useful for such purposes, comparing and contrasting it with the currently very fashionable concept of "social capital." I argue that it is the largely unexplored *information* dimension of social capital that lies at the root of the contention that communities with higher levels of social capital are able to develop optimal policies, poli-

cies here associated with the SWS. This argument thus both develops and challenges Robert Putnam's conceptualization of social capital by resolving a puzzle revealed in Putnam's own operationalization of the concept. Putnam views declining political participation as evidence of the "strange disappearance of social capital" in the US, yet his conceptualization of social capital leaves unexplained why his "culprit," increased television watching, should cause such a decline - a problem resolved by when the level of political knowledge central to the concept of civic literacy is brought to the fore.

1: THE SUSTAINABLE WELFARE STATE

While there is no consensus among the many students of the political economy of the industrial democracies, the combined weight of their research can be summarized as follows. On balance, while the more generous welfare states have in recent years traded off some efficiency to achieve greater equality, this has been kept within reasonable limits through appropriate institutional arrangements. The result has been that the majority of citizens, given the choice, tends to act to reinforce these arrangements as voters, earners, organizational members and consumers. Such actions (see Milner, 1996) are rational within the institutional context - for example, the Scandinavians' being prepared to pay for public services to meet their needs can be compared to Americans reinforcing arrangements that keep taxes and levels of redistribution relatively low (see Steinmo, 1993).

The sustainable welfare state (SWS) is based on the premise that, within a conducive institutional framework, decreasing marginal utility leads rational individuals to choose the more egalitarian distribution. Though some individuals are risk takers for themselves, they usually seek to reduce risk once the well-being of dependents and descendants are at stake since they cannot be certain of their future position. While different policy mixes are used to achieve more egalitarian distributions, the distinguishing feature of the SWS is the existence and resilience of such distributions. Whatever the indicator of redistributiveness, the Scandinavian countries, Austria, the Benelux countries and Germany most readily qualify as sustainable welfare states according to this measure (Milner, 1994).

Though choosing to maintain the institutions of the SWS is rational for most people in these countries, in a complex economically-interdependent world, it is by no means self-evident to the "ordinary" citizen what choices will have the desired effect. To do so requires information linking actors, policies, institutions and outcomes. I have argued that the institutional arrangements of the SWS - as they developed especially in Scandinavia (Milner, 1994; 1996)

- have been such as to enhance the capacity of individuals to make (institutional) choices that reinforce the capacity of the SWS to redistribute without unduly undermining its capacity to produce. A crucial dimension turns out to be that of knowledge, of reducing the cost of information. More informed individuals are less prone to be mistaken about the effect of the policies they support, and whom they choose to implement those policies to achieve the desired welfare outcomes. Societies characterized by (institutions promoting comparatively high levels of) informed populations are thus hypothesized to be more effective at achieving desired policy outcomes, outcomes associated with the SWS.

2: SOCIAL CAPITAL AND CIVIC LITERACY

Civic literacy is conceived simply as possession of the knowledge required for effective political choice. Higher levels of civic literacy should be associated with superior policy choices. To argue this, it is useful to draw a comparison with a concept that is frequently advanced these days as helping us identify the factors leading to optimal policy outcomes, that of social capital. Putnam puts it simply: "for a variety of reasons ... life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital" (Putnam, 1995: 6). Social capital is defined simply as "features of social life - networks, norms and trust - that enable participants to act more effectively to pursue shared objectives" (Putnam 1995: 664-5).

One of Putnam's major indicators of social capital is voting turnout, paralleling the importance I draw to voting turnout as an expression of civic literacy. But, Putnam finds a steep decline of social capital in the US in recent decades, and identifies increased television watching as the "culprit," distinguishing the negative effects of TV watching from the positive effects of newspaper reading on social capital. Yet, despite his insistence on the effect of media use on the quantity of social capital, the knowledge dimension captured in the concept of civic literacy is largely missing from his conceptualization of social capital.

This absence becomes crucial if we seek to use the concept comparatively - something Putnam has himself shied of doing. Despite social capital having drawn the attention of scholars in several countries and given rise to an informal international network, there is still no sign of the development of a common analytical framework allowing for the operationalization of social capital in comparative analysis. Putnam initially developed his concept in comparing the performance of Italian regional governments (Putnam, 1993). He then used it to compare the US at different historical periods. Where social capital is higher, he argues, life is better. While the Italian differences lie in

characteristics inherited from long ago, developments in the US have a more immediate explanation. There is a culprit for "the strange disappearance of social capital in America" (Putnam, 1996:3: as TV watching rose in the US in the last 40 years, the various indicators of social capital fell. Along with voting turnout, the percentage of respondents answering 'yes' to the question regularly posed in surveys of the American population: "can most people be trusted?" is one of three broad indicators of social capital identified by Putnam. The third consists of several measures of group membership and participation. On all three indicators, a parallel steep decline took place between the 1950s and 1990s.

After examining other possible explanations, Putnam sums up the evidence against television. "First, the timing fits. The long civic generation was the last cohort of Americans to grow up without television, for television flashed into American society like lightning, in the 1950s. In 1950 barely 10 per cent of American homes had television sets, but by 1959, 90 per cent did.... Most studies estimate that the average American now watches roughly four hours per day, (excluding periods in which television is merely playing in the background). Even a more conservative estimate of three hours means that television absorbs 40 per cent of the average American's free time, an increase of about one-third since 1965" (Putnam, 1996: 13-14).

Television, he suggests, destroys social capital through time displacement and effecting the outlooks of viewers by making them more distrustful. (He adds a third effect, though admitting all the evidence is not in. Children who watch a great deal of TV become more aggressive and less achievement oriented: heavy watching "is statistically associated with psycho-social malfunctioning" - Putnam, 1996:14).

But why should these mechanisms lead high TV watchers to vote less - as we know they do? Watching TV 3-4 hours a day clearly leaves less time for group activities, and - as a number of American studies suggest - may contribute to making one distrustful. Yet it is not convincing as an explanation for lower voting turnout. Little time is needed to vote - especially as registration has been made easier in the US in recent years. Indeed, with intensified use of television in political campaigning, we might - if anything - expect the opposite: higher voting turnout among the high TV watchers. Such anomalies have led some observers - despite confirming Putnam's empirical expectations about the link between high TV watching and low political participation - to conclude that it may simply be a case of getting the direction of causality reversed: non-participants watch more TV (Norris 1996; Uslander, 1996).

We might also be tempted to exonerate Putnam's culprit

based on comparative data. Americans watch more TV than just about anyone (see below), yet "America is already high as a generation of joiners, with a dense network of civic associations" (Norris 1996: 479). Putnam himself notes that America has a higher degree of community involvement and social trust than many other countries. In the figures he provides from the World Values Survey, the US ranks 5th in mean associational memberships (behind the Netherlands, Iceland, Sweden and Norway), and 7th, behind the above (minus Iceland) plus Finland, Denmark and Canada, in the percentage who agree that "most people can be trusted." Clearly the US is nowhere near as low as its high TV-watching figures would lead one to expect from Putnam's conceptualization. It is *only* when it comes to voting turnout that the correspondence is clear-cut. The US turnout rate in national elections is lowest - apart from the Swiss with their very weak central government and frequent reliance on direct democracy (see Table 1). In sum, when applied comparatively, Putnam's expectation that high TV watching results in low social capital is not confirmed by measures of community involvement and social trust - where the argument is plausible, and *is* confirmed in relation to voting turnout for which he provides no plausible explanation.

Should we simply retain the concept of social capital and find TV not guilty on the evidence? This would be to deny a social truth because it does not readily fit into the conceptual framework. A better alternative would be to replace social capital by civic literacy in the analysis - so that knowledge rather than trust or networks is at the core of our conceptualization.

Placing the knowledge dimension at the core of our conceptualization of social capital makes it easier to argue the case against high television consumption. First, knowledge can be operationalized into objective measures more readily than trust. And they are clearly related. The first step to genuine trust is reciprocal knowledge. Putnam is on the right track in his original conceptualization of generalized reciprocity in *Making Democracy Work*: 'I'll do this for you now knowing that somewhere down the road you'll do something for me.' Warren puts it this way: "What maintains a background of trust is my knowledge that I could monitor and challenge authorities and trusted others, as well as the others' knowledge that I can do so" (1996: 23). Only if people have the requisite knowledge to make sense of the politically, socially and economically relevant choices available to them can the "networks of civic engagement" develop and flourish, and, thus, the stock of social capital be maintained.

3: CIVIC LITERACY AND MEDIA CONSUMPTION

How is TV watching related to civic literacy? Norris examined the responses to the eight questions in the Ameri-

can Citizen Participation Study relating to political knowledge "including name-recognition of representatives and awareness of some constitutional issues and concepts." She found that, even controlling for social background, "the hours people spent watching television was negatively correlated ... people who watch a great deal of television know less about politics" (Norris, 1996: 478; see also Delli Carpini, 1993; Lambert et al, 1988). We know also that less informed people vote less. "There is near universal agreement [that]... more knowledgeable people participate at a much higher rate" (Junn, 1995:9). Moreover, the opposite appears to be the case with newspaper reading. Norris finds that individuals who read newspapers daily invariably average significantly higher rates of knowledge than those who do not. Putnam also contrasts newspaper reading with that of TV watching. "Newspaper reading is associated with high social capital, TV viewing with low social capital" (Putnam, 1996: 14).

One of the rare international studies that delve into these matters is by Bennett et al (1995). In their interpretation of factors associated with different levels of performance on a 5-country test of political knowledge, they conclude unequivocally: the crucial relationship to television watching is a negative one. "One finding stands out: the more people watch popular entertainment shows on television, the less they know about foreign affairs, even when other predictors are taken into account" (Bennett et al, 1995:32). This is exactly the opposite for newspaper reading which correlates strongly with correct answers on the five Times-Mirror questions on political knowledge on which their study is based.

Given the clear-cut relationship of political knowledge to voting turnout, turnout rates can serve as a comparative indicator of civic literacy. By replacing social capital with civic literacy in our wider analysis, and maintaining voting turnout as an indicator, we no longer need to rely as much on the rate of participation in organized groups, or the level of trust, both of which are problematic, especially in comparative analysis. Participation in organized groups has been found to be only weakly related to civic literacy. Junn (1995:27) shows, for example, that Americans active in non-political local activities were no more informed about political issues, institutions, or political actors, except at the local level. And while there is a positive relationship between political information and participation in political organizations, it is a weaker one than with turnout (Verba et al, 1996), and, unlike in relation to turnout, causality also goes in the other direction: participation in *political* organizations makes people politically more knowledgeable. Given different institutional frameworks for organizational participation in different countries, it is hard to conceive of any comparative indicator

of group participation that can meaningfully distinguish these factors.

As far as "trust" is concerned, Norris puts it plainly: "studies have found that trusting citizens are not more likely to vote, engage in campaign activities, or be interested in politics" (Norris 1996: 475). While more politically knowledgeable people can be expected to be more trusting, this is by no means the case under all circumstances - which makes the question of limited value for comparative purposes. Indeed, when comparative indicators are used, Putnam's expectation that TV watching varies inversely with trust is only very weakly supported. From the world values survey data Putnam cites, I ranked 16 countries for which I have TV watching averages on the basis of the average level of trust. The relationship between these two indicators is presented in **Figure 1**. To compare, in **Figure 2** I have placed as independent variable another frequently used indicator of civic engagement closer to civic literacy, namely the proportion of respondents who say they occasionally or frequently discuss politics from the 1981 World Values Survey. (Here, the US rates low, more in keeping with its TV watching score - see Inglehart, 1990: 343). As we can see from the two charts, if we replace trust by political discussion, the R^2 goes from .128 to .293.

If political knowledge is the key factor claimed here, what effect if any can be attributed to watching TV programs with political content? Norris found that those who watched more TV news and public affairs shows to be somewhat more knowledgeable than those who watched less. In contrast, McLeod and Perse (1994) found a *negative* relationship between the score on 14 questions testing public affairs knowledge and TV news watching (though a very positive one with newspaper reading) among their 480 subjects. While the passive nature of TV watching is the main factor here, a possible negative effect can be explained by the fact that the great majority of US news and public affairs shows watched have to compete for advertising dollars and thus ratings. This means oversimplification, sensationalization and exaggeration. High TV watchers with little overall political knowledge are especially vulnerable to such distortion. Perse and McLeod speculate that there is something anti-informative about these programs which seek out "stories about crimes, accidents and disasters that have little public affairs information" (Perse and McLeod, 1994:440).

The high level of commercialism in American television is a factor that must be taken into account in naming the culprit for declining social capital/civic literacy, especially if the analysis is to be used comparatively. The higher level of political knowledge among, say, Germans as compared

to Americans, is due not simply to their reading newspapers more, but also the fact that their television is less commercial. Semetko carefully studied the content of election campaign coverage in news programs in four countries: "Substantive issues were most important in Germany, followed by Britain and Spain, and then the US... The public service channels ... aired more substantive issue stories than the private channel" (Semetko, 1996:11; see also Semetko and Valkenburg, 1996).

The Bennett et al. study cited above singles out Germany. The survey, conducted in January 1994 by the Times Mirror Center for the People and the Press, asked representative samples of adults the same five questions about international affairs. The results are striking: the US is lowest with an average of 1.67 right answers, then Canada (1.9), Britain (2.07), France (2.13). Germany is easily highest at 3.58 right answers (Bennett et. al, 1995:43). A related finding comes from a rich source - unfortunately limited to EU members - the Eurobarometer surveys regularly carried out for the European Commission. Hofrichter and Klein examine the responses to questions in the Spring 1992 (# 37) Eurobarometer asking respondents to identify the cities where the four main EC institutions are located, and which was most powerful among them when it came to law making. Germany was among the countries with the highest levels with such knowledge, along with Denmark, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and Belgium. (The lowest included the four southern Europeans, Spain, Greece, Italy, and Portugal, and also Britain; France and Ireland brought up the middle.) Figure 4, discussed below, presents the response rates to similar questions in more recent Eurobarometer surveys.

Also pertinent is a study that includes more countries but is limited to knowledge of the United Nations (Millard, 1993). It tested respondents' ability to identify the UN Secretary General (from a list of 5) and name a UN agency. Among the 14 OECD countries included, the small countries of Northern Europe had the highest awareness, followed by Germany, France, Italy, Australia and the UK. Canada, Ireland, and, finally the US brought up the rear.

4: SOME INTERESTING STATISTICAL RELATIONSHIPS

These and other reported findings combined with observations of the different countries suggest that higher levels of political knowledge - greater civic literacy - is to be found in countries where there is less TV consumption - especially less commercial TV consumption - and higher rates of newspaper reading. As a preliminary test of this supposition, I have created an independent variable, a composite scale of what is termed "Media Consumption." It is

an ordinal scale based equally on the countries' ranking on television consumption and of newspaper reading. The TV consumption score is itself a composite, made up equally of a country's combined ranking on average number of hours of TV watching and of per capita spending on television advertising (in \$US). The latter factor is included to bring the commercial dimension into consideration for reasons discussed above. Having established each country's TV consumption ranking (highest consumption ° 1); we combine this with its rank in newspaper readership (lowest readership ° 1) to arrive at our media consumption score.

As dependent variables we first use tests of knowledge for which we have a sufficient number of countries. The first of these comes from Millard's report on results of a test of the ability to name a UN agency and its Secretary General. As we can see in **Figure 3**, the negative relationship with media consumption is so high ($R^2 = .87$) as to be uncanny. Clearly media consumption has something to do with certain kinds of political knowledge, including knowledge of the European Union in member countries, as revealed in **Figure 4**.

Figure 4 is based on the results of two Eurobarometer surveys. Eurobarometer #43 in the Spring of 1995 asked its respondents to identify (with the help of a map and a list of the countries in Europe) the names of EU members. (In all, only 11 percent of respondents identified all fifteen, and another 30 percent were able to name 2 to 14.) In the 1996 survey (Eurobarometer #45) respondents were queried on ten items concerning the EU, including the name of the President of the Commission, the number of commissioners from their country, the recently chosen name for the European currency, the country holding the Presidency of the European Union, and the city in which most of the European Union institutions are located. In figure 4, I used as the dependent variable the rank of the 11 EU countries for which we have media consumption data based on their combined average score on these two surveys (weighing the latter with its larger number of questions at double the former). While not astronomical, as in Figure 3, there is a strong correlation with media consumption.

Finally, **Figure 5** places the rank of each country in national turnout in the 1980s (from Table 1) as the dependent variable, with the four countries with compulsory voting excluded. It reveals the expected negative relationship with media consumption. Switzerland, not unexpectedly, is the distinct outlier, its very low voting turnout long attributed by observers to its unique system of direct democracy. Removing Switzerland brings the R^2 from .252 to a high .538.

CONCLUSION

Given the limited nature of the data and of the statistical analysis applied to it, these are anything but definitive conclusions. Nevertheless, combined with the conclusions of studies limited to one country or comparing only a few, a pattern can be discerned, a pattern that needs to be explored with a great deal more data and more sophisticated statistical tests of significance. For now, it serves the purposes of the present argument, namely to show the potential usefulness of the concept of civic literacy, of a knowledge rather than trust-based conceptualization of social capital.

But then what? After all, the conclusion that TV consumption is negatively - and newspaper readership positively - linked to civic literacy and voting turnout is hardly earthshaking. Yet there are significant potential policy implications that emerge out of our analysis. Media consumption is different from trust or even organizational density in that it is more directly a result of policy choices. The media consumption numbers are not accidents. The better scores correspond to policies designed to foster newspaper reading rather than commercial TV consumption in the Scandinavian and other countries especially when compared to the US (Milner 1994), just as better turnout scores, as has been noted, are associated with consensual political institutions.

To return to the wider speculations raised at the outset, the high civic-literacy countries tend to have consensual political institutions, institutions associated with sustainable welfare states. This paper began with the contention that societies with more knowledgeable populations are able and likely to maintain the institutions of sustainable welfare states, that is states that achieve more redistributive outcomes over the long term (Milner, 1996). Rather than using level of social spending as indicator of the SWS, which I argue both conceals important institutional differences and is much too subject to short term policy considerations (Milner 1994), I bring a last set of data here, namely recent Gini coefficients for the countries being compared, a measure I view to be the best single indicator of the SWS. The Gini coefficient measures the level of equality or inequality in the distribution of revenues among the poorest to richest deciles of the population. (At one theoretical extreme, a Gini of 0 indicates that the 10 deciles of households in a given society each have the same total disposable income, while, at the other, a Gini of 1 indicates that the richest decile has the all the disposable income.)

In recent years, the Luxembourg Income Survey (LIS) has standardized the methodology so that the LIS assembled Gini data now available for most industrial democracies

gives us a solid basis for comparison. In Figures 6, and 7, I provide scatterplots of the relationship between the two indicators of civic literacy: media consumption and average voting turnout, with the most recent Gini scores available. The relationship is as expected. The association with turnout is quite high ($R^2 = .612$); with media consumption it is lower, ($R^2 = .307$). Switzerland is joined as outlier by Italy and - though less so - Belgium. Both of the latter are more redistributive than what one would expect given their media consumption. The explanation may lie in the fact that these two are the most indebted of the countries, that

is, their redistributiveness a result less of institutionalized trade-offs than of short term borrowing.

Rather than repeat the argument of this paper, I end with a simple graphical illustration (in Figure 8). More comprehensive data and the application to it of more sophisticated tests of significance are needed to take that argument further, to give numerical weights to the arrows of causality, a project that should keep the author busy for the foreseeable future.

1 In my previous writings I have distinguished three dimensions of institutional arrangements: the organizational-economic and the informational-cultural, as well as the governmental-political discussed here. We shall see below that the informational-cultural dimension is closely connected to the governmental-political one.

2 Lijphart develops a two dimensional analysis of the majoritarian-consensual contrast. The most important of the five variables that make up the first and main dimension (the executives-parties dimension) is the proportionality of the country's electoral system (Lijphart, 1996:196; 1994:2). Powell (1996) adds another useful variable related to consensualism, namely the extent to which Legislative committee rules allow for opposition party influence. In his 1991 article with Markus Crepaz, Lijphart adds another variable: "corporatist versus pluralist interest group system" This is a variable that takes us closer to the economic realm of consensual or co-operative institutions (see Kenworthy 1995) and discussed in my previous writings. For the purposes of this paper, though the discussion of consensual institutions refers first and foremost to political institutions, it indirectly includes the other two dimensions, the organizational-economic and the informational-cultural, as well.

3 In response to my query on whether the ongoing pilot studies would be seeking out that information, the co-ordinator, Steven Rosenstone, sent me the following communication: "The political information items were not asked on the pilot studies. The planning committee thought that those items should be moved to the "background" section, meaning that each nation will ask an appropriate set of political information items so as to produce a 5-point political information scale within their polity. *It is a hopeless task to come up with items that will work in a comparable fashion across polities.* Instead, the hope is to have a scale in each polity that divides the population into quintiles of information" (my emphasis).

4 For example, the Center for Voting and Democracy's statistical analysis of the 1994 elections for the House of Representatives, found a clear correlation between margin of victory and voter participation: the more competitive an election, the higher the turnout:

Margin of Victory	Turnout	Number of Races
0.0% - 9.9%	42.7%	87
10.0% - 19.9%	39.7%	72
20.0% - 39.9%	39.7%	132
40.0% - 59.9%	38.5%	84
60.0% - 100.0%	29.7%	54

(plus 6 uncontested).

5 A recent Canadian study by Eagles (1991) found a similar, though weak, association between both the closeness of elections and the amount spent by parties at the constituency level with turnout in the 1980 and 1984 Canadian elections; but none in 1988. Eagles speculates that the effects of the local campaigns in 1988 "might have been nullified by the combined effects of the multi-million dollar campaigns of the national parties and the estimated \$10 million advertising campaign mounted by proponents and opponents of free trade in that election."

6 For example, Mancur Olson, develops this line of analysis in his analysis of Swedish economic policy (Olson, 1990).

7 I briefly discuss appropriate indicators of the sustainable welfare state below, arguing that the best single comparative measure of redistributiveness is the Gini coefficient.

8 Many American scholars have worked with "political knowledge" indicators in their work. Typically, it consists of a battery of questions either administered as part of the study - e.g. the 8 questions used by Verba et al (1996: 554-5). Often such - information-based - questions are combined with others of a general nature, such as the subject's self description as to frequency of discussing politics or following election campaigns in the media, to arrive at a scale of "political awareness" (Zaller, 1992). Though easy to pose in different international settings, responses to such questions are less useful than factual ones testing political knowledge, though these are far more difficult to standardize across nations and cultures. Zaller points out that respondents regularly misreport on measures of political attention due to "social-desirability induced exaggeration;" in one study 40 percent claimed they listened to National Public Radio, "above NPR's own internal estimates by a factor of about 10" (Zaller,

1992:334). The American National Election Studies regularly finds its sample to report voting at a level 15-25 percent higher than actually turned out.

A related area of research is the literature on factors explaining political participation. Insofar as such participation includes the more active forms of political activity stressed in some of this literature (e.g. Verba et al. 1996), it becomes a study of activity which itself not only indicates civic competence (Strate et al, 1989), or political awareness, but also enhances it. This is why we limit ourselves to turning out to vote in our operationalization of political participation. Moreover, unlike voting, Zaller notes that certain kinds of active political participation can be less than voluntary, e.g. "a city maintenance worker who must contribute work or money to the party machine in order to keep his job". (Zaller, 1992:335).

9 Putnam's work has inspired the formation of an international "social capital project," with its own newsletter edited by the director of the project, Australian researcher Eva Cox.

10 One exception I have recently encountered is a paper by Helliwell (1996) comparing social capital in Canadian provinces and US states. Helliwell simply uses the level of trust (most people can be trusted: Y/N?) as the measure of social capital. As I suggest below, this usage leaves many basic questions unanswered.

11 The most recent statistics bear out his pessimistic conclusions. Despite serious efforts to make registration far easier, voting turnout in the 1996 presidential election actually went down from 1992; while TV watching rates, based on surveys by the National Opinion Research Center rose by about 8 percent between the late 1970s and early 1990s. (Hao, 1994).

12 Though Putnam's work has generated great interest, there has been little systematic effort to examine his contention that TV is the culprit. One exception is to be found in a recent article by Norris (1996). Basing her work on the data from the America Citizen Participation Study (Verba et al, 1990) of 15,000 Americans, Norris confirms that number of TV hours watched correlates negatively and significantly with voting turnout - even when factors such as age, education and income are controlled.

13 Unfortunately these studies seldom venture into comparative assessments of political knowledge. Several of the national surveys ask questions that are potentially comparable, for example the name and party of one's representative in the legislature. (For example, the *Washington Post* - Kaiser - Harvard survey found two thirds of respondents did not know the name and one half the party of their representative in the House; Morin, 1996: 6). Yet to assert that this is low compared to higher levels of respondents elsewhere able to identify their representative's name and party - for example, the 67% and 73% of New Zealanders (Vowles

and Aimer, 1993) - ignores such institutional differences as parliamentary versus presidential, federal versus unitary, and unicameral versus bicameral systems (Vowles et al, 1995).

14 This is true of the US, UK, Germany and Canada. The exception is France, where it has little effect, probably because the *Times Mirror* poll reported that most French respondents reported reading local or regional newspapers which give little coverage of world affairs (Bennett et al, 1995:25).

15 Sources: *Statistical Yearbook, 1994-95, and International Television and Video Almanac 1996*. The data on the various indicators of television consumption used in this paper was compiled by Ian Malcolm.

16 Boiney (1993) explored the impact of potentially misleading political advertising employing a technique used in other commercial marketing studies. His subjects watched the same set of taped televised 30-second advertisements for candidates in races that had already taken place. After viewing each of six potentially deceptive ads, subjects were presented with a series of statements of the form, 'This ad is saying that...' followed by a claim related to material in the ad; they were also tested for political knowledge, which included being presented with a set of seven names of contemporary US political figures and instructed to identify their political office. (Only 55 percent could identify more than one of the seven political figures; and only nineteen percent could identify more than half.) As expected, subjects with low political knowledge were significantly more often misled by the ads. As Boiney explains it, "voters who do not know much about politics are less likely to recognize when an ad fails to refer explicitly to some piece of information upon which an invited inference turns. Without that information, they fill in the 'blank' with the interpretation that best fits with the scenario the ad has created, via mood-inducing music, attractive visuals, word choice, editing, argument structure and many other factors... [Hence] those with higher levels of political knowledge... should be less misled by ad claims than those with a dearth of such knowledge."

17 They were asked to identify: 1. the president of Russia; 2. the country threatening withdrawal from the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (North Korea); 3. Boutros Boutros-Ghali; 4. The ethnic group that has captured much of Bosnia and surrounded Sarajevo (Serbs); and 5. the group with which Israel has recently reached an accord (Palestinians, or PLO).

18 Not unexpectedly, the high-scoring Germans relied far more on newspapers for information than respondents in the other four countries. This finding is supported in a study by Semetko and Valkenburg (1996), who found three quarters of Germans stating that they read newspapers regularly compared to 47 percent of Americans. Similarly, a study comparing the high scorers on the OECD-StatsCan literacy test (discussed below), the Swedes with the low-scoring Americans, found that the Americans used TV sources far more and newspapers far less than the Swedes (Miller and Asp,

1985). Vromen (1995:81) found that among the young Australians she surveyed, those who read daily newspapers knew significantly more about Australian politics, while Hofrichter and Klein found daily newspaper reading, but *not* use of TV or radio, to be linked to knowledge of the EU.

19 Another study is relevant here. This is a three-part test of the literacy needed in today's world conducted by the OECD and Statistics Canada (1994) administered to large samples of the adult population in seven countries. The study tested the level of comprehension of three types of written materi-

als: one, understanding narrative prose; two, understanding documents, such as maps, trains schedules, etc.; and three, applying basic arithmetic skills. The countries were the US, Canada, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Poland. Sweden, the Netherlands and Germany had a significantly lower proportion among the illiterate (level 1) on all three scales than Canada and the US (though only Sweden outscored them consistently in having a higher proportion among the most literate - levels 4 and 5). The scores on the prose scale are as follows:

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5
Percentage				
Canada	16.6	25.6	35.1	22.7
Germany	14.4	34.2	38.0	13.4
Netherlands	10.5	30.1	44.1	15.3
Poland	42.6	34.5	19.8	3.1
Sweden	7.5	20.3	39.7	32.4
Switzerland (French)	17.6	33.7	38.6	10.0
Switzerland (German)	19.3	35.7	36.1	8.
United States	20.7	25.9	32.4	21.1

20 The newspaper consumption rating is taken from per capita daily newspaper distribution figures in the United Nations' *Human Development Report*, 1995.

21 It would have been useful here to separate information-oriented from entertainment-oriented TV consumption in the different countries, but this proved difficult to do because countries break their programming down differently, and because where there is a breakdown, it tends to be on programs offered, rather than time spent watching them.

22 From Millard, 1994, prepared by Survey Research Consultants International, Elizabeth Hann Hastings and Philip K. Hastings, editors.

23 The very high correlation means that there is more to this than the mere fact that people in large countries tend to learn less in their national media about international affairs than in small countries.

24 I hope in the near future to have gathered enough data to make this a composite scale taking into account turnout at local as well as national elections.

25 The ratings come from the LIS - with the exception of New Zealand, a country not yet covered by LIS, where the numbers are provided by Barker (1996), and the methods used correspond to those of LIS. Note that the numbers are typically for the early 1990s, though in a few cases, they are from the late 1980s.

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TABLE I

Country	Average Turnout: 1981-1990
Austria	83
Australia	85*
Belgium	87*
Canada	69
Denmark	84
Finland	78
France	77
Germany (W)	79
Greece	87*
Ireland	76
Israel	82
Italy	93*
Japan	71
Netherlands	81
Norway	82
Portugal	78
Spain	75
Sweden	85
Switzerland	41
United Kingdom	74
United States	51

* = compulsory voting

SOURCE: Jackman and Miller, 1995: 485.

FIGURE 1

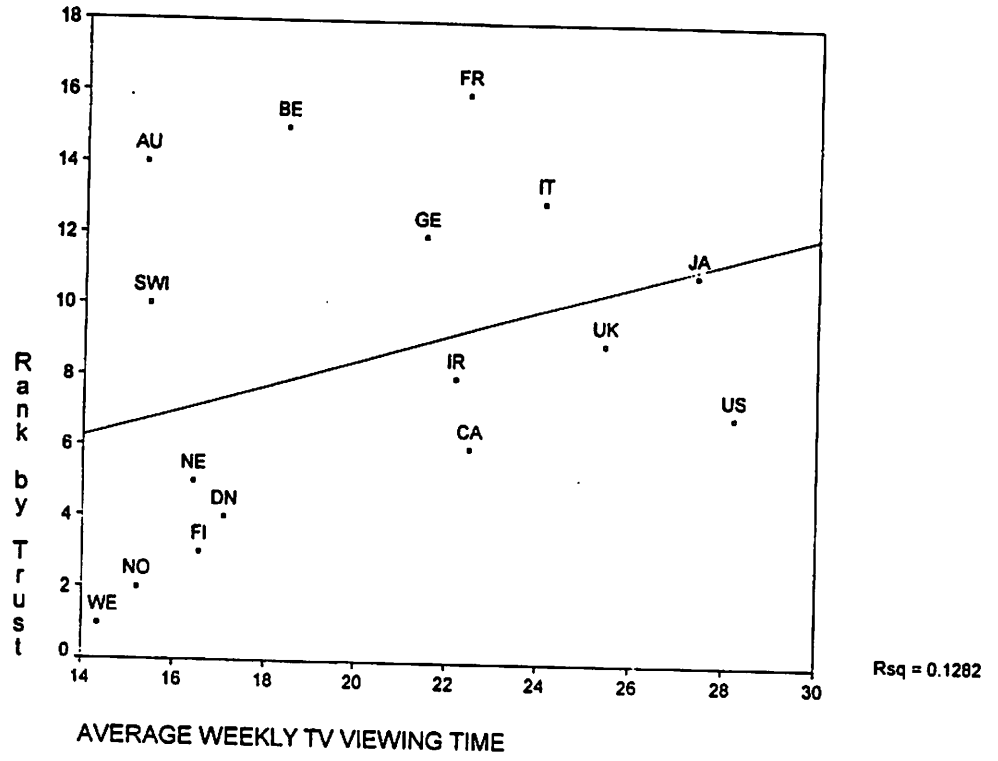


FIGURE 2

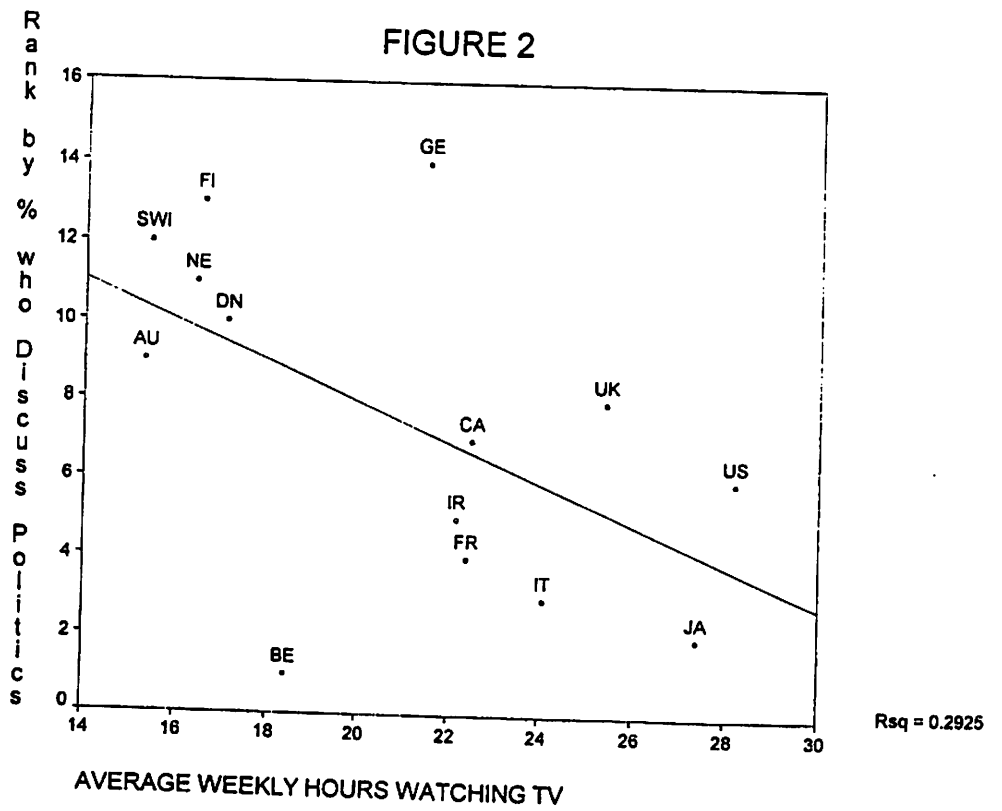


FIGURE 3

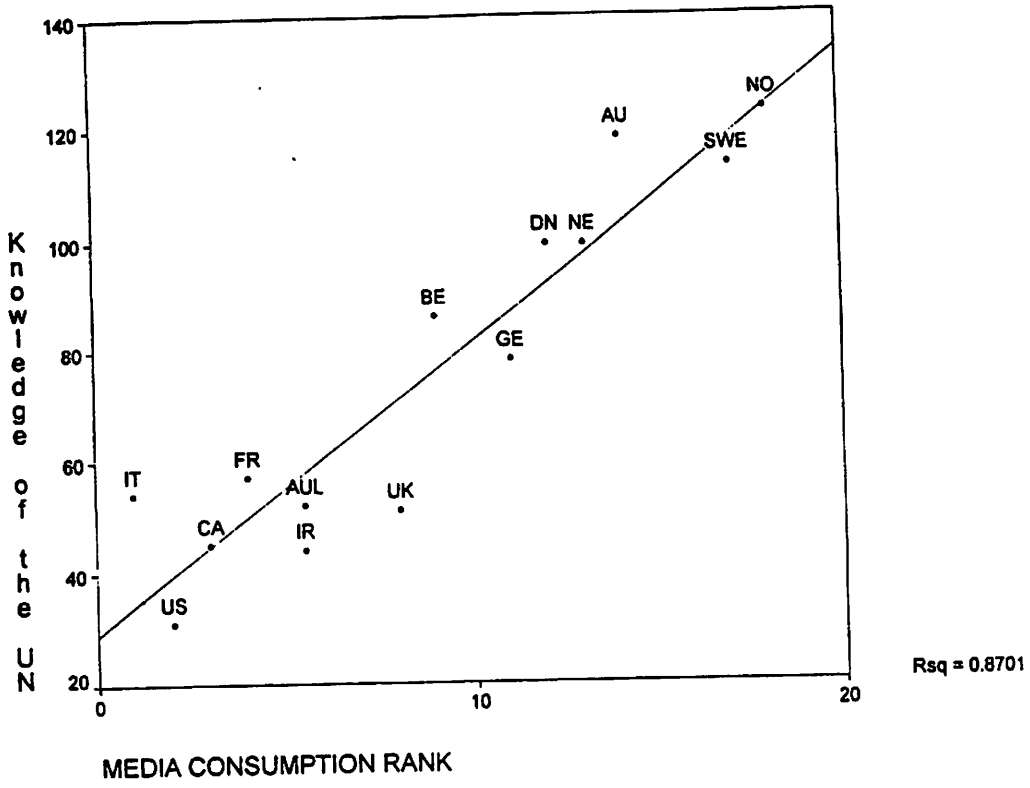


FIGURE 4

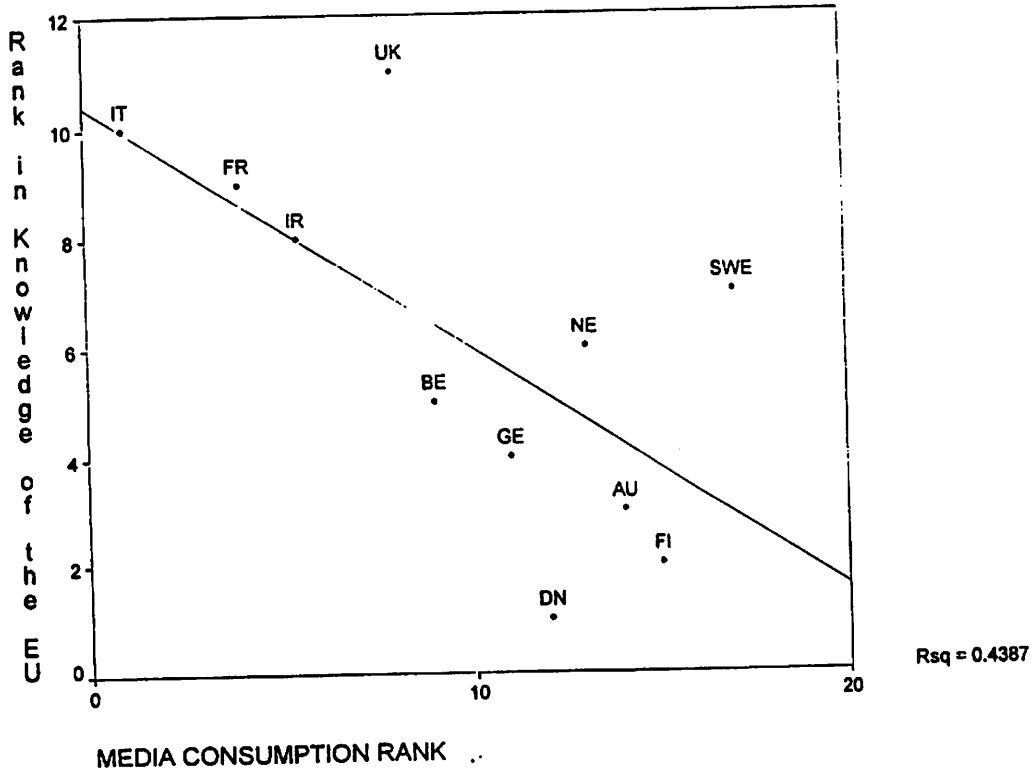


FIGURE 5

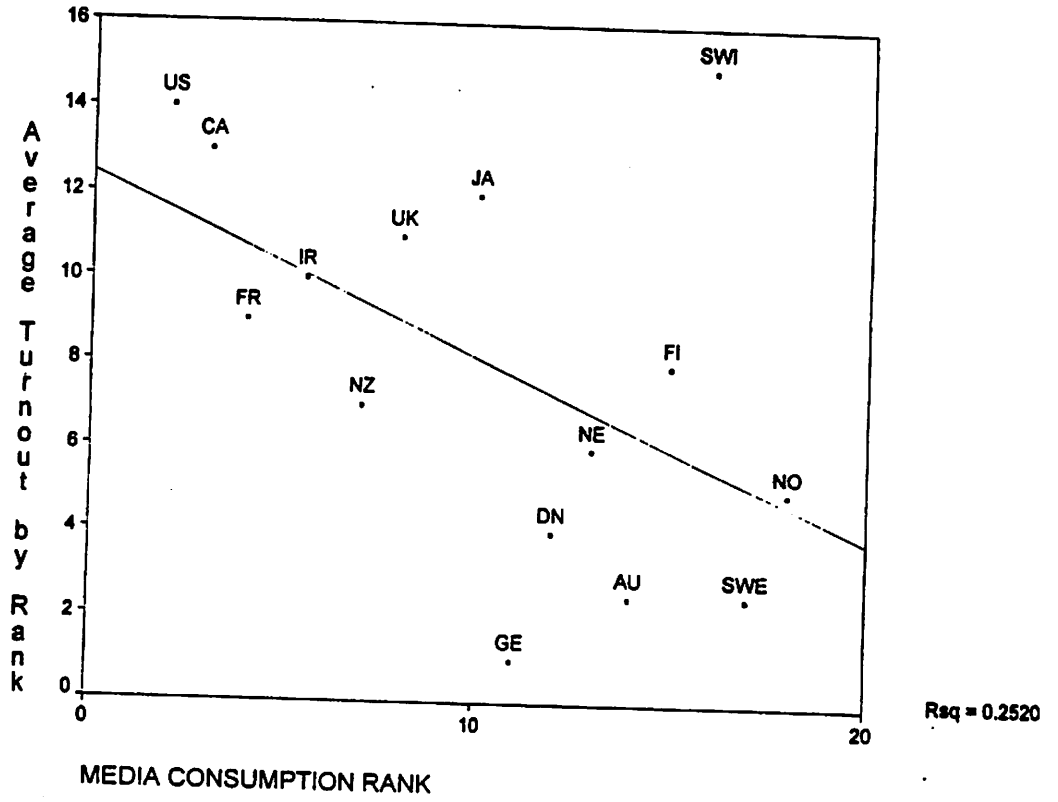


FIGURE 6

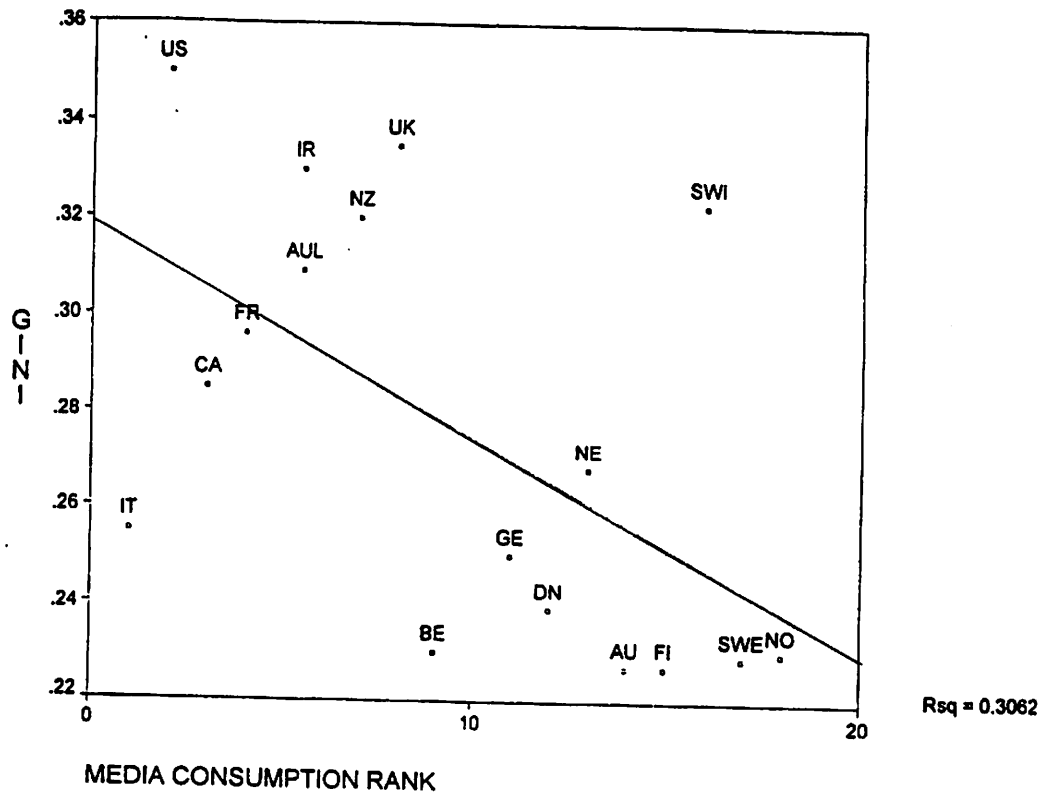


FIGURE 7

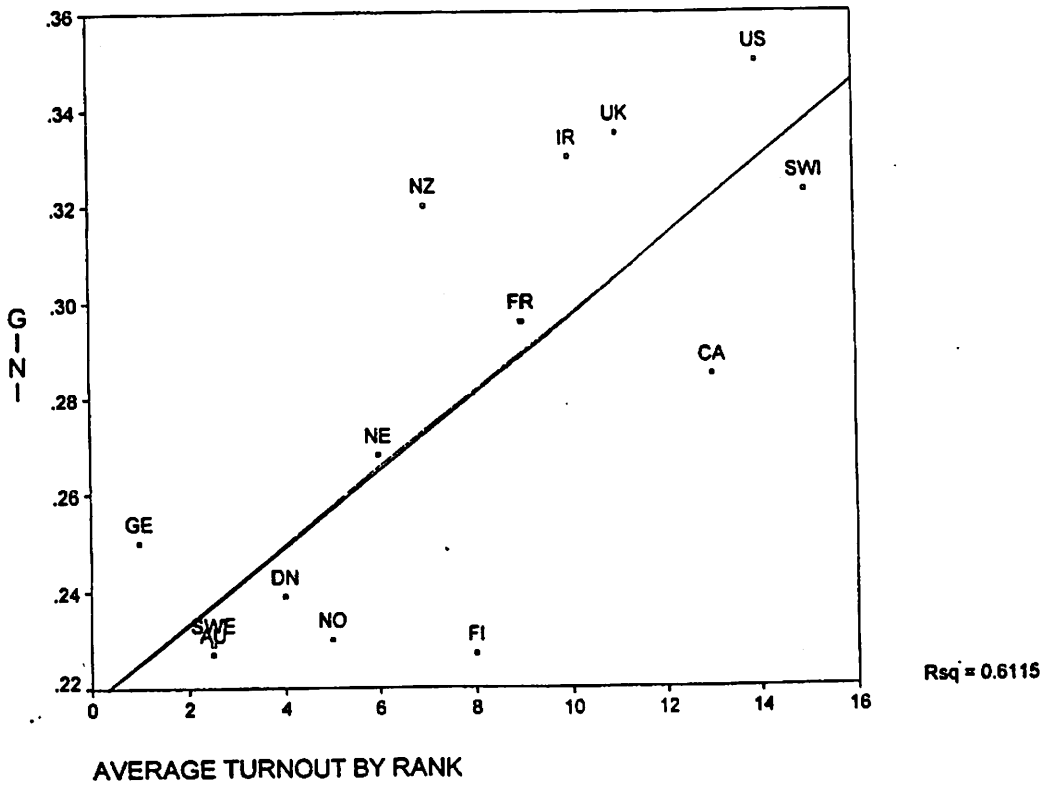


FIGURE 8

