THE VIRTUOUS CIRCLE OF NON-MATERIAL REDISTRIBUTION

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[Draft version]
INTRODUCTION

I approach this subject not as a political philosopher, but as an empirical social scientist. On policy related questions, philosophers, like economists, tend to be concerned with appropriate courses of action to be taken by decision makers, but do not concern themselves with the presence or absence of incentives to take certain courses of action and not others, incentives built into the logic of the institutions in which decision makers operate. In this paper, when looking at fostering equality, I am concerned not only with policies that may have such an effect, but, especially, with institutions that place incentives on decision makers to adopt such policies, and indeed, on voters to elect decision makers who will do so.

Political scientists have long grappled with the objective of equality. Real progress has been made toward understanding and applying the principle of political equality, i.e. how to reduce the gap in political clout between those with greater and lesser material resources, with applications such as to rules governing political contributions, media access, subsidies to political parties, etc.

On the other hand, there have been few efforts to link political institutions per se with socioeconomic inequality. In the 1970s a literature linking neocorporatist labour-market relationships with egalitarian outcomes emerged among European social scientists, primarily sociologists. What it showed was that the successful northern European countries were able to combine economic growth and more egalitarian income distributions through centralized negotiated agreements between business, labour and government resulting in policies which trained workers for, and moved them toward, higher paying industries and jobs.

My contribution is to the other side of the coin of this now well-established relationship between institutions and outcomes. With a few, partial, exceptions, analysis of this relationship was not extended to political institutions per se or to policies concerned with non-material outcomes such as education and the media. In my work during the 1990s I explored this relationship, arguing that without incorporating this dimension, we cannot fully understand the durability of
redistribution policies and outcomes in the more egalitarian societies, especially those in Scandinavia.

**CIVIC LITERACY AND NON-MATERIAL REDISTRIBUTION**

At the core of my analysis is *political knowledge*. In this paper, I try to integrate more recent developments into my comparative research. In *Civic Literacy: How Informed Citizens Make Democracy Work* in 2002, I argued that, when it comes to explaining differences in - and declining - civic engagement and political participation in mature industrial democracies, the fashionable emphasis on social capital placed too much stress on interpersonal trust and too little on political knowledge. On an aggregate basis, I showed, levels of interpersonal trust show no correlation with voter turnout. Even at the individual level, controlling for education and other relevant factors, while trusting persons are somewhat more likely to vote, the effect of trust pales when compared to the effect of political knowledge, especially when it comes to younger, less educated citizens. I showed further that the conceptualization of social capital as reflecting levels of participation in voluntary associations was also problematic. When it comes to civic engagement, not all associations are equal: it is participation in groups that disseminate knowledge or exchange information that helps individuals make sense of political choices that most clearly contributes to political participation.

*Civic Literacy*… found a significant positive relationship at the aggregate level between various indicators of political knowledge and voter turnout at the national and the local level. This relationship, as I show below, served to shed light on the findings of studies of political participation (e.g. Lijphart, 1999) which showed voter turnout to be highest where elected representatives are elected through proportional representation.

I explored policy choices directly affecting the capacity of individuals to make sense of their political world, in particular the contention that high levels of newspaper reading contribute to civic engagement, while high levels of television consumption have the opposite effect, Linked to this, *Civic Literacy*,
marshaled evidence about the emphasis different industrial democracies place on lifelong learning, making particular use of findings based on the data from the IALS (International Adult Literacy Survey - OECD 2000). (Below I look at Scandinavian policies related to political knowledge dissemination through the media and educational institutions.)

In combining the various direct and indirect indicators related to political knowledge, I developed the concept of civic literacy. The word civic was chosen because it combines in one word the notion of exercising one’s role as citizen and of being a member of a local community. No single indicator exists for the ‘literacy’ component of civic literacy. But a combination of partial measures allows us to compare nations and communities along this dimension. The word literacy was chosen because it implies that there is a known quantity that is attainable by each individual, that, it cannot be "stocked" unlike, say, knowledge or capital. A minority can build up a community’s stock of physical capital, and, by implication, social capital. However, though one person may read much more than another, both contribute equally to the overall literacy rate of their community.

Unlike political knowledge or political sophistication, civic literacy is thus a term, like the awkward term “cognitive mobilization” still used by some political scientists, that applies to societies rather than individuals. A working definition would be: the proportion of citizens with the minimum level of political knowledge needed to make sense of the political world and thus choose effectively among political alternatives. Of course there is no possible precise empirical indicator of civic literacy, but, this is the case for social capital and other such indicators.

Differences in civic literacy are understood to result from differences in these three areas of institutions and policies. Boosting civic literacy is conceptualized as non-material redistribution, i.e., policies related to education, information and the media in the context of compatible institutions, that have as objective and outcome boosting the knowledge and skills of those at the low end in non-material as well as material resources.
There is a straightforward connection between civic literacy and reduced material inequality linked to neo-corporatist arrangements designed to enhance the capacity of those at the bottom to gain well-paid employment. But there is an equally important indirect relationship between civic literacy and socioeconomic equality via democratic political participation. Through political participation people ensure that their interests are taken into account in the decision-making process, and, in the context of appropriate institutions, gain and enhance the skills and knowledge to act as effective citizens. Institutions and policies promoting civic literacy can produce a virtuous circle by themselves fostering informed political participation. These, in their turn, can lead to more equitable socioeconomic outcomes. Such outcomes encourage citizens to keep well informed of governmental decisions - beginning the cycle once again.

These relationships are illustrated in Figure 1. There is a set of quite complex relationships in which civic literacy is an end in itself, illustrated in the centre and left of the chart. Certain policy choices enhance it: These are both direct, as depicted by the arrows leading to indicators of civic literacy, for example policies promoting newspaper reading, as well as indirect, depicted by the arrow leading to consensual political institutions. It is also a cause. The arrow going from civic literacy suggests that high civic-literacy is conducive to optimal policy choices, both as a “virtuous circle” reinforcing civic literacy-enhancing choices, and also, as illustrated by the arrow to the right side of the chart, contributing to the society’s capacity to attain relatively egalitarian outcomes.

**FIGURE 1**
An empirical confirmation of this relationship can be found in the results of the IALS assessment of the extent to which people in 20 countries possess the literacy needed to function as an effective citizen (using a highly sophisticated cognitive proficiency test developed by Statistics Canada and administered by the OECD). It tested the reading comprehension of a large sample of the population aged 16 and over (OECD, 1997; 2000). In its report appeared a particularly striking chart, one which dramatizes the close relationship between income inequality and functional literacy. I reproduce it as Figure 2. Its message is dramatically clear: *democratic societies that more equally distribute intellectual resources also more equally distribute material resources.*

![FIGURE 2](image-url)

_Inequality in the Distribution of Literacy (9th to 1st decile)_

\[ F = 34.535; \text{Signif} [F] = .000 \]
A key intervening factor turns out to be political participation, as we can see illustrated in a chart using the IALS data combined with voter turnout averages in municipal elections. **Figure 3** shows that *democratic societies that more equally distribute intellectual resources attain higher levels of political participation*. This suggests that, to put it bluntly, because they promote higher levels of political participation, societies that more equally distribute intellectual resources – high civic literacy societies - will also be those that, over the long term, more effectively redistribute material resources. This is the pattern observed in Scandinavia. In 1870, the literacy rate in Sweden was 75 percent, roughly even with the US, and behind Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, Canada and the UK, and well ahead of Norway, at 55 percent and Finland, at 10 percent (Crafts, 1997: 306). Since then, Scandinavia has stood out in non-material redistribution - its propensity to incorporate the knowledge dimension into a wide range of the programs.
As conceived here, in the context of institutions through which informational (non-material) as well as material resources are fairly and effectively distributed, citizens of the high civic literacy societies gain an adequate understanding of the relationship between their own choices and the outcomes they favour. Below I explore the political institutions conducive to the dissemination of such information, and how these constitute a key sphere of non-material redistribution.

POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIC LITERACY

Franklin (1999), in his analysis of turnout variations in elections to the European Parliament, concludes with a statement at the heart of the approach taken here: “Turnout seems above all to be affected by voters’ awareness of the consequences of their decisions.” In other words, the more their institutions are able to simplify the relationship between their actions and political outcomes, i.e. the lower their cost of political knowledge, the more political systems will foster citizens at the margin turning out to vote.

When this principle is applied to political institutions generally, it can be expressed as coherence versus fragmentation. Other things being equal, countries that disperse power between President and Parliament, between two chambers in a parliament (Arnold 2007, Gordon and Segura 1997), and between central and regional governments in a federation, reduce the potential for citizens’ awareness of the relationship between actions and outcomes. Presidential systems, federal systems, and bicameral legislatures, whatever their other benefits, render the link between one’s choice as a voter and its institutional effect less visible and comprehensible. While they may not be appropriate in large, pluralistic countries for other reasons, unitary, unicameral, parliamentary systems, like those in Scandinavia, reduce the cost of gaining the knowledge necessary to cast an informed vote or otherwise participate meaningfully in politics.

When this knowledge-based logic is applied to electoral systems, the set of institutions via which ordinary citizens register their choices as to who will make political decisions on their behalf, a crucial quality associated with fostering
citizens’ awareness is proportionality. Fully developed, the proportionality of party representation to its popular support (PR) is a principle that extends beyond the allocation of seats in the legislature. Institutional arrangements based on PR extend to representation in local and regional assemblies, even school boards and various councils in which parties have a legitimate place, as well as to the regulations governing media access and public financing for parties. The underlying principle is to ensure that all legitimate political positions among the population enjoy equitable public expression. More than a mathematical formula, when systematically built into political institutions, proportionality becomes part of the political culture: the degree of representation of a partisan political position is understood to reflect its popular support.

When systematically built into representative institutions at the various levels, and, even more so, when combined with unitary, unicameral, parliamentary institutions, an appropriate proportional system of elections promotes a politically knowledgeable population, and thus informed political participation. I stress informed participation because, while PR tends to promote higher turnout simply by widening choice by not excluding from representation relatively weak parties whose support is not geographically concentrated, this is not in itself our primary concern.³

With the number of candidates having a real chance of winning the district being equal to 1, or the chances of one’s preferred candidate winning approaching zero, under a non-proportional (SMP) system, rational individuals can arrive at non-voting on a simple cost/benefit logic. But this effect is not large, since the same logic can discourage citizens from voting in most elections since the chances of actually affecting the outcome are minimal. The main effect is an indirect one, via incentives on political parties on how they allocate scarce resources in their mobilization strategies. And here political knowledge directly enters the equation. Under PR there is an incentive for parties to mobilize potential supporters to vote even in areas where they are weak, while under the alternative system, SMP, this is largely limited to winnable districts,⁴ since the
choices of a relatively small number of voters can make the difference between monopolizing political power and having none whatsoever.

The scarce resources include not only money, but also time, quality of local candidates and which issues are stressed. In all of these, political knowledge enters, since fundamental to mobilization, especially when the electoral rules encourage this - as they tend to do in PR countries (see Bowler, Carter, and Farrell 2000) – is the task of informing insufficiently informed potential voters. In the terms of Gordon and Segura (1997), the electoral system, along with the party system and legislative institutional structure, affect the availability, clarity and usefulness of political information, and, thus, the level of political sophistication.

The fact, thus, that the average voter under PR has greater knowledge about the available choices is only the tip of the iceberg of the relationship between the electoral system and informed electoral political participation. Conventional thinking tends to assume that voting effectively under SMP is a simpler proposition since it is typically a choice between “keeping the bums in or kicking them out.” But such conventional thinking views voters one-dimensionally. It ignores, first, the reality of party identification, which develops over time. By favouring stable party identification, PR elections reduce the costs of political knowledge, especially for those for whom it is at a premium.

Stable party identification is more likely under PR since, compared to SMP, there is far less incentive for parties to engage in precipitous changes to their programs and identity, to the elements that constitute their place on the political map. Parties under SMP are driven to frequently change their image, via their platforms and leaders since any volatility in support is exaggerated in party representation: Moreover, a parallel logic operates at the level of the electoral district. We know that single-member constituencies under SMP encourages catering to narrow local interests; but this too is but the tip of the iceberg. SMP overvalues the choices of the least partisan citizens, those who can make the difference between winning and losing marginal seats. In contrast, under PR,
legislators elected on a proportional basis in a multi-member district are less prone to lose sight of the fact that it is the party that links them to the electorate. Under PR, political actors, and the voters themselves, can thus count on a relatively clearly drawn and stable political map on which to plot their own paths. For political actors, this includes reliable expectations (underlying choices) about with which other actors to cooperate and over what issues. They gain greater benefits and face fewer institutional obstacles (costs) from sharing political information. In comparison to SMP, under PR there is less incentive for political leaders, who may very well need their opponents’ support after the election, to use distortion to inhibit the awareness of the electorate of alternative positions on the issues of the day. Under SMP, with so much depending on so few votes, there is a strong tendency for politics to become a ruthless zero-sum game -- you lose; I win – creating an incentive for distorting the opponent’s position (through appeals to emotion, negative advertising and the like), while keeping one’s own policies as vague as possible. The result, whatever the intentions of the actors involved, is a public less informed than it needs to be.

A case in point emerges from recent British politics. To defeat Thatcherism, Tony Blair pushed Labour firmly to the centre, creating “New Labour.” Yet the powerful Conservative majority he overcame was in fact an artifact of the electoral system, highly vulnerable to defeat by a Labour-Liberal Democratic coalition, had the elections been fought under PR and not SMP. A “Lib-Lab” government would likely have enacted centre-left policies similar to those of New Labour. But there is a profound difference between Blairite policies emerging as a compromise program of government between parties of the centre and left rather than from a party transformed almost beyond recognition. In the former case, normal under PR, a coalition government implements a compromise program reflecting the expressed choices of a majority of voters, but constituent parties retain programs reflecting the evolving expectations of party supporters.

One reflection of this was the dramatic decline in democratic participation in Britain during this period (18 percent fewer citizens voted in 2001 than in 1992),
and the current move to the centre by the Conservatives to win power could further erode electoral participation. Beyond this, the interplay of incentives built into the electoral system influences the political knowledge of the citizens. The transformation of Labour into New Labour ripped up the political map, changing the settings on the citizen’s political compass. Especially in the context of an SMP environment in which parties concentrate mobilization efforts – including providing information – on voters in marginal districts, such a transformation makes it all the harder for the citizen low in political knowledge resources to effectively apply to current choices the distinctions drawn from past experience. And this can make the difference between having and lacking the minimal knowledge needed to cast a meaningful vote.

There is also a second, vertical dimension to this relationship. The logic of SMP discourages parties from risking operating at levels other than the one at which they are best organized. A national party has a disincentive against investing resources to compete in elections to assemblies and councils in regions and municipalities, since poor outcomes weaken its overall image. Over time, this has the effect of pushing national parties away from operating at all at the regional and local level. Where national parties are not present at lower level political activity, vertical political links are weak and vertical communication flows disrupted. Citizens find themselves with a political map from which side roads that connect the small communities to the main centres have been erased. The opposite logic operates under PR. In the case of Sweden and Norway, for example, once PR was adopted for the national legislature, its use spread to other levels to become embedded in a system of vertically integrated relationships centered on the political parties.7

Of course, the electoral system is not the only factor explaining the presence of national political parties at the base – as we can see in the case of the UK, where local elections serve largely as a kind of nation-wide poll on the national parties. Nevertheless, as a rule, the closer the institutional fit between the two
levels, PR elections, congruent constituency boundaries, etc., the greater the chances of vertical continuity, the clearer the political map.

In these ways, the political map under SMP is harder to read than under PR. The result is that under the former significantly more citizens low in material and non-material resources are effectively excluded from meaningful participation in choosing who will govern them and have an input into what policies they will follow. In terms of the analysis set out here, the absence of proportional electoral institutions inhibits non-material redistribution.

EMPIRICALLY TESTING PR’S EFFECT ON INFORMED ELECTORAL PARTICIPATION

To summarize so far: because PR systems are more conducive to the formation and durability of programmatically coherent parties that contest elections throughout the country and at more than one level, they provide potential voters with a political map that is relatively clearly drawn and stable across time and space. They make it easier for the potential voter with limited political knowledge to locate oneself politically, i.e. to identify with a party and to use that identification as a guide through the complexities of issues and actors over time and at various levels of political activity. In this way PR fosters civic literacy and electoral participation especially at the lower end of the education and income ladders, where information about issues and actors is at a premium.

How can we put this argument to the test? Unfortunately, the data for directly testing this assertion comparatively by using political knowledge as the dependent variable (with electoral systems as independent variable), or the independent variable (with turnout as dependent variable) are inadequate, since there is as yet no standard set of factual political knowledge questions used cross-nationally. Nevertheless, it is possible to derive insights using the responses to the various political knowledge questions used in cross-national electoral surveys (CSES). Kimmo Grönlund and I (2006) found a higher correlation between the level of education attained and political knowledge in the
SMP CSES countries than in the PR ones. We examined the dispersion of political knowledge among educational categories by calculating the variation from the mean for each CSES country of the political knowledge score by the group with the lowest education. We reported that the average dispersion was significantly lower in countries using PR. In the PR countries, the average correlation of number of correct answers with level of education attained was 0.26, compared to 0.33 under SMP institutions.

We tested further by using a classification of countries’ electoral institutions that is not simply dichotomous, PR and non-PR, one based not on institutions but on outcomes, i.e. how close to proportional the number of seats won by parties was compared to the vote they received. Figure 4 reproduces a chart using as one indicator that derived from Lijphart’s (1999:162) application of the Gallagher Index of Disproportionality to elections from 1945-1996, and the dispersion of political knowledge among educational categories rate (F score) on the other.
The Effective Number of Parties Scattered against the Effect of Education on Political Knowledge.

There is a reasonably strong linear association in Figure 4, which, when the clear outlier Belgium (unlabelled) is excluded, becomes highly significant ($r=.62$).

The dispersion of political knowledge among educational categories is a good indicator of non-material redistribution. As we saw in Figure 2, non-material redistribution is associated with material redistribution. This is confirmed in Figure 5, where we can see that political knowledge is especially dependent on completed education in countries where income is more unequally distributed, whereas in the European welfare states political knowledge tends to be less tied to education. Figure 5 displays a strong linear association ($r_{xy} = 0.39$): in
countries where income is generally more equally distributed, political knowledge is not primarily dependent on formal education, whereas in countries where economic resources are more unequally distributed, education tends to drive political knowledge.

As in Figure 4, Belgium by far the most significant outlier. Indeed, if Belgium is excluded from the above, rxy rises to a high 0.68. The findings here correspond to the picture gained from the limited available data suggesting that Belgium is lower in civic literacy than comparable Northern European countries (Milner 2002, 60–1). Is compulsory voting part of the explanation? Is the complexity of its consociational institutions another? An interesting subject for future research.

**FIGURE 5**
The case of Belgium notwithstanding, the finding that it is in the more economically unequal countries that relative level of education has a greater impact on political knowledge is an important one. If we compare Sweden and the United States, it is clear that Swedes with a low level of education potentially exercise much greater political influence than their American counterparts. As political knowledge, the presence of which increases the likelihood of political participation, becomes independent of structural constraints, we approach genuine as opposed to merely formal political equality.

NON-MATERIAL REDISTRIBUTION VIA THE MEDIA AND THE SCHOOLS

Practically speaking, how do proportional electoral institutions find their way into an egalitarian distribution? If PR and related institutions result in more informed voting among those with limited resources, it is reasonable to suppose that they will support policies that favour more redistribution. But, I suggest, under appropriate conditions, they will also support policies that favour higher levels of non-material redistribution and so giving rise to the virtuous circle identified early in this paper (See Figure 1). I noted there that the strong positive relationship between levels of material and non-material redistribution is linked especially to media and education related policy choices.

The former relationship is illustrated in Figure 6. I place data from a survey that tested respondents’ knowledge of the United Nations’ (Millard, 1993) on the X Axis, and TV dependency on the Y axis. The latter is a compound measure composed equally of two elements: average weekly television watching and per capita spending on television advertising (Milner 2002: Appendix III). Countries tend to be high in commercial television consumption, or in newspaper circulation, but not both (or neither). Figure 7 plots the close relationship between TV dependency and IALS data on the percentage of citizens able to read the written materials necessary to exercise that citizenship. (The IALS tested the reading comprehension of a large sample of the population (aged 16 and over) on three types of written materials: narrative prose; documents, such as train schedules and
medication instructions; and problems requiring application of basic arithmetic skills.) The very close correspondence between comparative scores in TV dependency and the level of political knowledge was found to provide a more convincing explanation of the relationship between television watching and voter turnout decline than Robert Putnam’s claim that the negative effect of television watching on civic engagement works through time displacement and reduction of interpersonal trust (Putnam, 1996).

**FIGURE 6**

\[ F = 89.02469, \text{Signif}[F] = .0000^{***} \]

\[ * = \text{Signif}[F] = .01; ** = \text{Signif}[F] = .005; *** = \text{Signif}[F] = .001 \]
In my 2002 book I describe the Nordic countries efforts to encourage newspaper readership at all levels, such newspaper subsidies, support for public service television and radio, and a range of programs via “people’s high schools,” lifelong-learning associations, libraries, and other networks concerned with disseminating knowledge, targeting adults at the margins of literacy and numeracy. The recent announcement by the government of Finland to guarantee universal free broadband access is latest step along these lines.

These measures take us from media to education policies, in particular policy choices associated with adult and civics education. There is some evidence that high civic literacy countries placed greater importance on adult education, and, less clearly, on civics education directed at students – a subject addressed in my forthcoming book (Milner 2010). In my earlier work, I stressed the importance of compulsory education inculcating what the IALS calls literacy habits, showing
that countries with lower levels of functional illiteracy among their adult populations (in the IALS) tend to be those with the highest levels of scientific literacy among the lower stratum of young people nearing the end of their formal academic studies. What matters thus is the capacity of the schools to bring students near the bottom to the basic level of cognitive proficiency, to assure that the students attain the functional literacy required to comprehend the basic texts and documents associated with competent citizenship.\footnote{13}

This brings us to adult education, organized efforts to enhance the knowledge of individuals who have completed their formal schooling. Its voluntary and open-ended nature makes adult education distinct, but also relegates it to a secondary place in societies’ educational policy priorities, and means we have limited comparative data. The absence of comprehensive aggregate data on adult education forces us to rely on indirect information based on surveys of samples of the adult population. The most comprehensive such survey is that of the IALS, but it makes no distinction between participation in adult education and job training programs. The Nordic countries lead with annual participation rates over or at 50 percent, followed by New Zealand at 48 percent. Except for Ireland and Belgium, which trailed with levels in the 20s, the remaining comparable countries clustered between 44 and 37 percent. My work stresses the importance of study circles organized by lifelong-learning associations in Scandinavia in attaining such results.\footnote{14}

\section*{CONCLUSION}

This is not the place for specific policy recommendations. I would, however, stress the need for academic researchers concerned with equality to place more emphasis on non-material redistribution, civic literacy and the incentives built-into institutions. I conclude on the note of urgency with which I ended my book in 2002, raising the prospects of a widening digital divide.

Democratic societies … face the prospect of mirroring a globalized world economy with its minority of “winners,” and majority of “losers” - losers not
only due to economic deprivation, but, increasingly, to their inability to take informed action to make their society better for themselves and others. Only high civic-literacy societies institutionally arranged so that a substantial majority of their citizens have meaningful maps to guide them through the complexity of decisions that their community will face in the coming years, will, potentially, be equipped to meet the challenge. Only those communities can hope to fairly distribute the costs of globalization and new information technology so as to draw optimal advantage from their benefits.

REFERENCES


NOTES

1 At the end of his comprehensive study, comparing the “Westminster” versus “consensual” models of democratic institutions, Lijphart (1999) introduces this dimension, writing of the “kindler, gentler” qualities of the latter in areas such as “welfare statism”, environmental performance, criminal justice and foreign aid.

2 Note that unitary systems can be highly decentralized. When it comes to the proportion of spending determined at the local level, the Scandinavian countries are more decentralized than many federal countries including Australia (See Lijphart 1999).

3 It is possible to boost the turnout of these otherwise least likely to vote simply by adopting compulsory voting. But it is far from clear that those who vote simply to avoid paying a fine will be sufficiently informed so as to cast a meaningful vote.

4 The extreme case of this is found in the effect on the communications’ strategy the Electoral College on US presidential campaigns which have come to exclude all but toss-up states.

5 It is no coincidence that VAAs, (voting advice applications), which provide the voter with an electronic, objective, and individualized way to compare her or his policy preferences with those provided by the candidates and parties have developed almost exclusively in European PR states.

6 A study comparing the political marketing strategies of parties in the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, found that the latter differed from the others in that the larger parties avoided negative advertising targeting the small parties, since they knew they might need their support in forming governments (From a talk by Jennifer Lees-
Moreover, in comparing differences between average national turnout and average local turnout under SMP and PR, I found a significantly larger gap in the countries in which national parties play little or no role in local politics, such as the United States, Canada and New Zealand, than in the European countries where they are very much involved (see Milner 2002, Chapter 5). One indicator of this difference can be found in career patterns. As noted in the classic study by Eldersveld and his colleagues from interviews of 250 to 400 local leaders in 15 to 20 comparable municipalities in the majoritarian United States as well as consensual Sweden and the Netherlands in the latter 1980s, concluding that “there is a strong vertical structuring of the party relationships in Europe among policy leaders, from the bottom to the top of the system, unlike in the US … The role of the political party as a very relevant, powerful, integrative institution for the entire system is very distinctive in Europe, in contrast to the US (Eldersveld, Strömberg and Derksen: 1995:239).

There are no common questions, but a modicum of similarity emerges out of the stipulation that their content be chosen to try to have them answered correctly by roughly 2/3, 1/3, and 1/2 of respondents respectively.

To standardize, in creating the composite, each indicator was recomputed to bring it to a score for which the maximum attained was close to 100.

The most up-to-date figures are found in a new report by the World Association of Newspapers. In a press release on June 4th 2001, it stated: “The Norwegians and the Japanese remain the world's greatest newspaper buyers with, respectively, 575 and 570 sales per thousand population each day. Finland comes third with 445, and Sweden follows with 417…. The figures on newspaper reach, or readership, among adults find Sweden leading the world for the first time with 88 percent, overtaking Finland, which has dropped 5 points to 86 percent since 1999 and now ties second place with Norway.”


The X-axis of Figure 4 displays the average percentage for each country that scores in the lowest of five categories in the three tests. This group might best be described as functionally illiterate, corresponding, in our terms, to those people clearly lacking the literacy skills to comprehend the written material needed to be competent citizens.

For example, the daily newspaper 8 Sidor (8 Pages) is published in simple Swedish and distributed to those with low reading skills. Cassette recordings of the daily newspapers are sent out free of charge to people with dyslexia or vision impairments.

In the 1997 IALS (OECD, 1997, sixty-two percent of Swedes over 16 without high school completed score average or higher (literacy levels 3, 4 and 5), compared to 17 for the last-place Americans.

There are in all, about 350,000 such study circles in Sweden. The ABF, the workers’ educational association affiliated with the trade unions and Social democratic party, is the largest of 11adult education associations, annually organizing about 100,000 study circles for over a million participants. Typically, the program of the ABF offers the usual
range of courses in languages, computers, art, music, nature appreciation, etc., but also courses in organizing groups and co-operatives, in public speaking, writing and understanding media, as well as study circles on various relevant topics such as social and civil rights, the United Nations, war and peace, democracy, feminism, and important contemporary books.