Bowling Alone

The Decline of Civic Engagement and the state of American Citizenship

• Argument by Robert Putnam in his book *Bowling Alone*

What is Social Capital?

• What is capital?
  – Any asset or advantage
• What is *social* capital?
  – Connections among individuals
  – Social networks and the norms that arise from them.
Examples of Social Capital

- Norms of social behavior.
- Generalized reciprocity or The Golden Rule
  “If you don’t go to somebody’s funeral, they won’t come to yours.”
  Yogi Berra

The Need for Social Capital

- “Trustworthiness lubricates social life.”
- Distrust places a high cost on society.

Evidence for the Decline
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– Political Participation
– Civic Participation
– Connections in the Workplace
– Informal Social Connections
– Altruism, Volunteering, and Philanthropy
– Reciprocity, Honest and Trust
– Small groups and the Internet?

Informal Social Connections

• People are less likely to...
  • play cards or other “social” games
  • have friends over
  • eat at full-service restaurants or have family dinners
  • participate in sports like softball
  • bowl in leagues and more likely to “bowl alone.”

Possible Causes
Busy-ness & Time Pressure

• Twice as many people say they feel rushed as did 30 years ago. However...
  ※ Americans are not working longer hours.
  ※ People have as much as five more extra hours of free time a week.
  ※ People who work longer hours are more likely to participate in groups.
    “...those who are always on the run forgo ER before the Red Cross and Friends before friends”

Women in the Work Force

• More women are joining the work force to give the family added income.
• However...
  ※ Studies show that stay at home mothers are not more civicly engaged.
  ※ Working usually strengthens civic engagement
  ※ Participation has declined more among men than among women.

Suburbanization

• The greater the social homogeneity of a community, the lower its level of political involvement.
• Without differences from conflict people fail to interact.
  “suburbia is a collective effort to lead a private life.”
Commuting
- American adults average 72 minute a day behind the wheel--more time than cooking or eating and more than twice as much as the average parent spends with their kids.

Television
- Television is the only leisure activity that inhibits other leisure activities.
- The only activities that increase as television viewing increases are sleeping, resting, eating, housework, radio listening, and hobbies.
- Selective viewers are more socially active than habitual viewers.

Distrust of Government
- The distrust for the government that was produced by Vietnam and Watergate stuck with the young people, causing them to be detached from society.
The Sixties

- The Sixties generation encouraged a separation from society and a sense of individualism.

Generational Replacement

- The people that lived through WWII were behind the social structure of the 50’s and 60’s.
- These people had united together and saved the world. They felt a pride that pushed them to be active in both society and politics.

Who Killed Civic Engagement?

- Pressures of time and money 10%
- Suburbanization, commuting and sprawl 10%
- Electronic entertainment 25%
- Generational change: 50%
So What?
How much does this matter and how does it impact politics?

Protection against tyranny
• Associations allow individuals to work together and protect themselves from abuse by political leaders

Decline of the Middle of the Road
• Beyond the demonization of opponents.
• Americans at the political extremes are more engaged in civic life, whereas moderates have a tendency to drop out.
“The Heart Enlarged”

• Group activities instill habits of cooperation and public-spiritedness and teach understanding and the practical skill needed to succeed in public life.

• “Feelings and ideas are renewed, the heart enlarged, and understanding developed only by the reciprocal action of men upon another.”

  • Tocqueville
  • Democracy in America