Bowling Alone Study Guide

Bowling Alone by Robert D. Putnam

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

In Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Robert Putnam discusses the decline of social engagement during the twentieth century. Using data from a wide variety of sources, he shows that social capital and engagement have declined in areas such as organizational membership, attending religious services, attending club meetings, and interacting with others face-to-face in communities. He posits several explanations for this decline and argues that generational succession accounts for about half of the overall change. He also examines what the deficit in social capital is doing to individuals, communities, and America. Finally, he discusses how America could reverse the trend and start revitalizing social capital.

Putnam examines a number of different areas to see whether a decline in participation has actually occurred. He finds that political, civic, and religious participation has declined. He also finds that connections in the workplace and with family and friends have declined as well. Volunteering, reciprocity, and trust in others have also declined during the last half of the twentieth century. In doing so, he finds that older Americans are often more engaged than younger Americans. He also finds that small groups, social movements, and the internet have seen increased participation.

Next, Putnam turns to trying to explain the decline in social capital since the 1950s. He argues that financial anxiety and the changing workplace may account for up to ten percent of the change. Sprawl and suburbanization account for another ten percent. Television also accounts for some of the change; however, the largest factor appears to be generational succession. The generation born before WWII is more engaged, while the baby boomers and Gen X'ers are more individually focused and less engaged in society and civics.

The decline in social capital has a number of consequences for society. When social capital is high, children do better in school, neighborhoods are safe, people prosper, the government is better, and people are happier and healthier. A deficit in social capital leads to more suicide, depression, crime, and other social problems.

While increasing social capital is not an easy task, the individuals of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era did just that, forming new organizations and associations that got people involved again. Putnam argues that society can follow this example to right the problem of declining social capital in the United States.

Section 1: Chapter 1, Thinking About Social Change in America

Section 1: Chapter 1, Thinking About Social Change in America Summary and Analysis

In Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community, Robert Putnam discusses the decline of social engagement during the twentieth century. Using data from a wide variety of sources, he shows that social capital and engagement have declined in areas such as organizational membership, attending religious services, attending club meetings, and interacting with others face-to-face in communities. He posits several explanations for this decline, and argues that generational succession accounts for about half of the overall change. He also examines what the deficit in social capital is doing to individuals, communities, and America. Finally, he discusses how America could reverse the trend and start revitalizing social capital.

The Glenn Valley Bridge Club in Pennsylvania doesn't meet any longer, even though it still had forty members playing regularly in 1990. The Sertoma Club in Little Rock, Arkansas had almost fifty people in the 1980s, who attended the weekly luncheon and other activities; now, only seven people come. Similar patterns exist in Virginia, Illinois, Texas, and across the rest of the United States. Community organizations all over the country have lost members, and many clubs and organizations have ceased to exist, even though they were thriving ten or twenty years ago.

In the 1950s and 1960s, community groups were expanding, bringing in new members and being more active than ever before. Political activity increased and churches were full. Many Americans seemed to have more free time than ever before. The time period wasn't without its problems, however. Segregation still was legal and common, and racism, although decreasing somewhat, was still fairly high. Infant mortality was still relatively high, and poverty was largely ignored.

This book examines what happened after this period in civic and social life. Social scientists have looked at the changes in society through the lens of social capital, arguing that the social networks in civic and social life have value. Putnam points out that a society that is isolated from each other is not rich in social capital. Individuals form connections with others at least partly out of self-interest, gaining things from those connections. Yet, social capital also affects the environment, so individuals are not the only ones to receive all the benefits or negatives from the connections. It is both about private good and public good. Social networks also build rules of conduct, particularly those of reciprocity.

Although terms such as social capital, reciprocity, and community can sound positive, each has its negative connotation as well. Networks may work well for those connected, but they may have negative consequences for the wider society. Putnam reminds the

reader that social capital allowed Timothy McVeigh to bomb the federal building in Oklahoma City. Social capital also allowed the KKK to continue its reign of terror in the South for decades.

Social capital comes in many different forms. Some are repeated and intensive, such as groups who meet each week for drinks. Other forms are episodic and virtually anonymous, such as a person that you see at the grocery store occasionally. Still other types are highly organized, such as PTAs. Some exist to benefit the community and others to benefit individuals, such as a bridge club. Putnam argues that the most important distinction may be between bridging and bonding, or inclusive and exclusive social capital. Bonding is a more inward-looking type of group that reinforces exclusive identities, such as fraternal organizations. Bridging brings people together and mobilizes solidarity. Ethnic communities are one example of bridging social capital. Putnam suggests that bonding social capital is like superglue and bridging social capital is like WD-40. Bonding social capital links people with their family and close friends, but bridging capital may be more important when looking for jobs or to get ahead.

Social capital is essentially about the old debate between community and individual. In the United States, national heroes and myths often focus on the individual. The collective effort is often ignored. Many people have debated the waxing and waning of the community in America. Putnam says he is not arguing in the book that community bonds in America have become weaker. Rather, he says that history shows ups and downs in community involvement. He believes that people in America can choose to reinvent those bonds of community. He wants to investigate whether things really are worse today in community involvement, or if it is just our imagination.

One of the problems in investigating this type of question is that historical data must be relied upon. This data may not always be exactly what Putnam wants or what he would have chosen if given the chance to do it himself. He has tried to use a variety of evidence, but social change is uneven and hard to measure.

Section 2: Chapter 2, Political Participation

Section 2: Chapter 2, Political Participation Summary and Analysis

American's involvement in the government and political life has changed over the last thirty years. Except for voting, America's political involvement is about the same as other democracies. There are many ways for people to express their views and exercise their rights.

In 1960, over sixty percent of voting age Americans voted in the Presidential election. In 1996, around 49 percent voted in a similar election. Over the last thirty-six years, voting has declined by about twenty-five percent. Yet, these numbers only tell part of the story. During much of the nation's history, registration requirements prevented many people from voting. In addition, blacks were disenfranchised, particularly in the South. During the 1960s, many of the voting requirements were changed, and millions of Americans voted for the first time. This influx of new voters probably hides the decline that had already been taking place. The new voters simply replaced voters who were no longer participating.

Many people have tried to explain the decline. Some of the explanations that have been put forth include a distrust of the government, decreasing social bonds, and a decrease in party mobilization. Putnam argues that the decline can be explained by the replacement of New Deal voters with the generation that came after them. Generational change and social change are often related. Intracohort change happens within a generation, such as changing music tastes over time. Intercohort change is between generations, and it can transform a society. Social change often involves both of these types. In the case of decreasing political participation, most of the change comes from intercohort change between the generations.

Voting is an important part of political participation, but it is not the only way people participate. Pollsters have been tracking American's political interests and actions for decades. Like the decrease in voter participation, interest in public affairs also fell between the 1970s and late 1990s. Similarly, the new generation is much less knowledgeable about political affairs than the previous one. Reading the newspaper has dropped from two-thirds of the population to one-third of the population and watching the TV news has also dropped. However, not all areas of political participation are decreasing. People still follow national election campaigns in similar numbers to several decades ago.

Both following politics and voting are not really social capital, as they are individual actions. However, party organizations seem to remain strong, becoming richer and more professional since the 1950s. Party finances have risen, which has led to more

staff, more advertising, and more outreach into the community. Yet, loyalty to a party has dropped. In addition, volunteering for a party has also decreased. The gap between the party and the voter means that parties have to reach out more in order to get voters to vote for them. Participation in politics is also more likely to be giving money rather than volunteering time.

Pollsters have also asked people about civic activities such as signing a petition or running for local office. These polls show that Americans are less likely to attend a rally or work for a political party today than they were several decades ago. Fewer people are also running for office or attending town/school meetings as well.

Putnam argues that people are less likely to participate in civic activities when those activities depend on other people. Committees need more than one person to function. The cooperative forms of participation have declined more than those that can be done individually, such as writing a letter to a Congressperson.

Section 2: Chapter 3, Civic Participation

Section 2: Chapter 3, Civic Participation Summary and Analysis

America has always been a nation of organizations. Americans are more likely to participate in voluntary organizations than members of almost any other nation. Thousands of organizations exist in the United States today, many of which were also in existence in the 1950s. Official membership in an organization is one aspect of social capital, and it gives a good indicator of community involvement.

The number of voluntary organizations has increased. In 1968, there were 10,299 organizations and in 1997, there were 22, 901; however, not all these organizations have mass membership. Many voluntary organizations don't have any individual members at all. The average membership in these organizations is about one-tenth as large as in the late 1960s. The headquarters for many of these organizations is also no longer located near large concentrations of members, but in Washington D.C., where staff can lobby for legislation and other political aspects. These groups rely on the money of individuals, but not really the individuals themselves. The members don't meet together like the fraternal organizations that used to exist. Many of the new organization don't even have local chapters; they are really mailing list organizations. The AARP is one of the largest of these organizations. Membership only takes a few minutes each year to maintain, and members don't need to participate other than signing a check.

However, these new organizations are very different than the classic organizations in social capital and connectedness. Few people use these organizations to connect with others. Although these groups are powerful politically, they are not bringing people together or increasing social capital.

During much of the twentieth century, chapter-based organizations grew in their membership levels. The population in the United States was also growing, but even when that is considered, people were still joining. There was a dip in membership rates across the board during the Great Depression, but otherwise, there was a more or less steady climb. By the late 1950s, involvement started to decline, although the overall numbers continued to rise for a few more years.

Putnam argues that membership figures are somewhat problematic for use in looking at trends in involvement. The popularity of specific groups may wax and wane over time, but this may not relate at all to overall community involvement. In addition, being a member doesn't mean that someone will be actively involved in an organization. Someone can belong, but not be active in an organization.

Several major studies that look at longitudinal data did examine involvement. The number of people who are card-carrying members has not dropped significantly in the last several decades. Some organizations have fewer members, but other organizations

have gained members. College graduates are about 30 percent less likely to be a member of an organization than in the 1950s. The decline is even more noticeable when the surveys looked at actual involvement in the organization. In the last two decades alone, the number of individuals who had served in a leadership position had decreased by 50 percent. People are also attending fewer meetings per year in the organizations in which they belong. In terms of the number of hours that a person is involved per month, the rate fell from an average of 3.7 hours in 1965 to 2.3 in 1985 and 1995. Americans are also spending a lower percentage of their annual income on annual dues.

Section 2: Chapter 4, Religious Participation

Section 2: Chapter 4, Religious Participation Summary and Analysis

Religious organizations have been an important part of civil society in America. As social institutions, churches are robust in America. Some estimates of religious observance suggest that people's adherence grew steadily from 1776 to 1980. Faith communities, which bring people together, may be the largest source of social capital in the United States. Half of volunteering in America happens through churches, as does associational membership. Churches and other religious institutions also support a wide range of social gatherings and activities. They have also been, in many cases, incubators for civic participation and community interests. People who are active in churches often gain skills such as leading meetings and managing disagreements that can help them in civic participation. Those who attend church are more likely to vote and participate politically than those individuals who do not attend.

Studies show that people who say that religion is important to them are often more socially active, visiting friends, attending club meetings, and belonging to sports, professional, school, and service clubs. Those who are involved in a religious organization seem to know more people. Some studies have shown that religious people talk with other people 40 percent more than those who are not. It is also a strong predictor of whether a person is involved in volunteer work or philanthropy. Over half of church members volunteer and up to 80 percent give to charities.

One reason for the connection between religion and altruism is the power of religious values. Religious ideals often promote commitment and action. The connectedness of the people within religious communities also bolsters their likelihood to act and give. Churches have long been important providers of social services, spending millions of dollars annually to help others. They support food programs for the hungry, provide shelters for the homeless, and self-help groups to those trying to improve their lives.

Churches have also been strongly associated with many social movements in the United States. The church was at the forefront of movements such as abolition, temperance, and civil rights. These organizations have been central, in many cases, to civic engagement and social capital for minority groups. The African American church, for example, has long promoted involvement in civic affairs and social movements fighting for increased equality.

Americans' religious commitment appears to have been pretty stable over the last several decades. This may be surprising given the discussion on the secularization of modern life. Most Americans say they believe in God, and there has only been a modest decline in people who say that religion is important in their life. Many scholars have

debated the trends in religious behavior. Most agree that church membership was at its highest point in the 1950s, and that it fell off slightly in the following decades. Although denominational numbers have their problems, most show an increase from the 1930s to 1960s, a plateau, and then a slow decrease of about 10 percent from the 1960s to 1990s.

In studies looking at actual participation in religious organizations, most show that 40 to 45 percent of Americans attend services in a given week. Studies show a slump in attendance from the 1950s through the 1990s, although modestly, by about 10 percent. Scholars do warn that people may not accurately report their attendance on studies, "misremembering" whether they actually made it to service. Either way, church participation is lower today than forty years ago. Participation in religious activities outside of services also appears to have fallen off. One study that looked at Americans' diaries found that Americans spent about two-thirds as much time in the 1990s as they did in the 1960s. Americans are also about 10 percent less likely to claim church membership.

Some scholars suggest that religion has become more privatized, particularly among the younger generations since the 1970s. Attendance and participation for older Americans has increased slightly since the 1960s. Putnam suggests that America is becoming split into two groups: those who are devout and those who are "unchurched." The pace and change is also somewhat dependent on the denomination as well. Catholics, for example, have increased in America over the last several decades. However, attendance for Catholics has also trailed off, while the decreasing number of Protestants continues to attend weekly services about as much as they used to.

Mainline Protestants and Catholics are both likely to be involved in service within the wider community. Church attendance does seem to be tied more to secular volunteering than to religious volunteering. Conservative congregations are less likely to offer social services than liberal or moderate congregations.

Section 2: Chapter 5, Connections in the Workplace

Section 2: Chapter 5, Connections in the Workplace Summary and Analysis

Work-related organizations, including unions and professional associations, are some of the more common civic connections. The pattern in these organizations is similar to other organizations in society, with an increase in the first part of the century, a plateau in the 1950s and 1960s, and a decline during the remaining decades of the twentieth century.

Labor unions have been one of the most common affiliations in America. The rate of union membership, however, has been falling since 1975. As with other organizations, the type of participation has also changed. Unions are often viewed now as paid bargaining units and the networks of reciprocity that used to exist has all but vanished. Is the change simply due to the changing reflection in the American workforce? Manufacturing has declined, but this is only part of the story. Union membership has still declined among the potential members. Some of the decline may also be related to the bad rap that many unions took for their actions during earlier parts of the century.

The number of people who are members of professional associations has doubled in the last four decades. By the 1990s, about 16-20 percent of the population was a member of a professional organization; however, the potential number of members for these associations has also generally grown. In addition, because of the number of professional associations, the pattern actually resembles the other aspects of social connectedness when individual organizations are considered.

Social participation in work organizations has not increased to take up the slack for other declines in social connectedness. Putnam questions whether workplace connections have taken over from location-based connections. In many modern workplaces, collaborative projects are encouraged or expected, and many people create rewarding friendships with others in their workplace. However, Putnam warns that there are no studies that indicate that socializing in the workplace has increased, and many studies show that co-workers account for less than 10 percent of friends. The ties in the workplace tend to be casual and fun, but not intimate.

Work today has become more contingent; layoffs are common and no job is completely safe. Employees are more anxious about their jobs now than in the past. At the same time, workers also have more independence in many cases, and the rewards for merit have increased. While the workplace remains a site of volunteer requirement for the wider community, fewer employees are volunteering. Workers are spending more time at work as well.

Studies also indicate that workers are increasingly unhappy with their jobs, which can affect social capital. Some studies show that as many as one in four workers are chronically angry on the job. Another problem to work social capital is that time at work belongs to the employer. We aren't paid to build social capital. Putnam argues that there is enough evidence to suggest that the disappearing social capital in the community hasn't just transferred over the workplace. While some aspects encourage social capital, other forces in the workplace inhibit it.

Section 2: Chapter 6, Informal Social Connections

Section 2: Chapter 6, Informal Social Connections Summary and Analysis

Informal connections, such as getting together for dinner with friends, playing cards, or having a reading group, are often more frequent than the formal connections that happen in organizations and the workplace. People who invest lots of time in formal organizations are known in Yiddish as "machers." Those who spend time in informal conversation are "Schmoozers." In American life, machers attend club meetings, go to church services, volunteer in community organizations, and follow politics. Schmoozers engage in less-organized participation, although they have an active social life. Most people fall into one category or the other, or they fall into neither. Fewer people overlap as machers and schmoozers.

The two groups reflect a number of differences. Machers are often better educated and have higher incomes. Their formal community involvement tends to peak in late middle age. Schmoozing often peaks in young adults, with a decline after that. Single people are also more likely to be schmoozers, who most often rent or move frequently as well. In the past, the greater percentage of machers were men, and women were more likely to be schmoozers.

Visiting friends has been an important social practice traditionally. Although some people believed that this would decline as people increasingly moved to cities, this wasn't really the case, particularly in densely-populated areas. Although people may know fewer people in the city, cities support many loosely-connected communities. People still spend a lot of time with friends. Almost two-thirds of people in the 1990s report going out at least once in the last week to see friends. Some studies indicate that schmoozers may be more common in modern American than machers. People are more than twice as likely to see friends once a week than they are to attend a social club.

From the 1950s to the 1990s, the average American was likely to attend a church service and visit relatives almost every other week. Eating dinner out and sending a card to someone happens on average about every three weeks. Playing cards and entertaining in one's home happen about once a month. The average American has been more isolated from civic and social participation, but he or she still seems to be engaging with friends. Not everyone is average and some people participate more than others. The evidence does suggest that we are connecting with others less than in previous years, however. Putnam suggests that this may be a function of modern life; dual income families may not have the time or energy to have friends over, and dining out hasn't really increased over the last two decades. Many Americans prefer staying in with loved ones after a hectic week rather than going out with friends. Studies have also

found that fewer families are sitting down to an evening meal together. Vacationing together, watching TV together, and attending religious services together have also decreased. The number of people playing cards regularly with others has also fallen.

What are the implications for spending less time with friends and neighbors? Some studies indicate that sporting activities have become slightly more popular in the last several decades. Yet, other studies show that participation in sports has fallen. Some sports have become more popular such as in-line skating, golf, and fitness walking. Most of the newer, popular sports are solitary, though. Team sports tend to be losing participants. Participation in youth sports seems to have hit a plateau. Only bowling seems to be holding its own in terms of participation. It is the most popular competitive sport in the United States, even in recent years. Young people tend to go bowling 40 percent more than do activities such as in-line skating. Participation is also solidly middle-class and popular with men and women, young and old.

While people are bowling more than ever, league bowling is decreasing. From 1980 to 1993, league bowling decreased by forty percent. Yet, many more people bowled in 1996, than voted in the congressional elections. Putnam acknowledges that the term "bowling alone" is somewhat of a misnomer, as most people do bowl in informal groups. Yet, the social capital gained is less than that of league participation.

Section 2, Chapter 7, Altruism, Volunteering, and Philanthropy

Section 2, Chapter 7, Altruism, Volunteering, and Philanthropy Summary and Analysis

Some people see volunteering and philanthropy as a measure of social capital. In order for it to be social capital, however, it needs to have the component of "doing with." Simply doing good, like dropping a check in the mail, isn't the same thing. Social networks are often the ways that people recruit other people for volunteer and good deeds. People who belong to formal and informal social networks are more likely to engage in civic participation as well.

The value of caring for others is strong in the United States. In earlier times, volunteering and philanthropy happened mostly through religious communities. By the end of the nineteenth century, however, helping others came to be seen as a civic duty. In the twentieth century, volunteering became more organized. Churches remained important, but other organizations also provided ways to volunteer and be altruistic. Many civic organizations became involved in finding and mobilizing volunteers, including the Boy Scouts and the PTA. Other organizations were founded based on volunteer labor, such as the March of Dimes and Habitat for Humanity. By 1996, there were over 600,000 public charities in the United States.

About half of Americans report some type of volunteer service, including informal and formal settings. Americans also give money to different charities and causes. In 1997, Americans gave $143.5 billion to charity. Some people give both time and money, but others focus on one or the other. Those with more personal resources are more likely to give time and money. Education is one of the best predictors of volunteering or altruism. The size of the community can also make a difference; volunteering is more common in small towns than big cities. Volunteering is often more likely for the middle of life as well, particularly for parents of school-aged children. Involvement in community life is the best predictor of volunteering.

Social connections encourage volunteering in many ways. Oftentimes, simply being asked by others in a person's social network is enough to get them to volunteer. Fundraisers can also create friendships among the people working on the event. Once a person is included in these types of activities, he or she is likely to continue. This means that volunteering often produces more volunteering.

Putnam argues that the trends in volunteering relative to America's resources are dismaying. Americans donated a smaller percentage of their income to charities in the 1990s than ever before. Americans have also worked on fewer community projects over the last several decades; however, people report doing more volunteering. Putnam argues that people may see volunteering as a personal service rather than a community

one. Volunteering among seniors has almost doubled over the last twenty-five years. Seniors are often healthier today than in the past and often live longer, two factors that help explain this increase.

Section 2: Chapter 8, Reciprocity, Honesty, and Trust

Section 2: Chapter 8, Reciprocity, Honesty, and Trust Summary and Analysis

Reciprocity is the "touchstone of social capital" according to Putnam. The idea is that one person does something for another, without knowing if or when the favor will be returned. Many moral rules are based on this idea, such as the Golden Rule. A society that operates with reciprocity is more trustful and is more efficient, since people don't have to calculate the costs of acting or receiving constantly. However, social trust and reciprocity work only if everyone puts into the system. Both reciprocity and trust, in addition, are often related to the density of the networks. The denser and more frequent the network interactions, the more trust there will be in most cases.

Social trust in the sense of giving people the benefit of the doubt is often related to social capital and civic participation. People who trust others generally volunteer more and participate more in social and civic organizations. Putnam suggests that those who trust others tend to be all-around good citizens. Those who do not participate are more likely to believe that they are surrounded by bad people. Putnam argues that social trust is different than trust in the government or institutions.

Although polls have asked questions about trust for decades, the questions and answers are ambiguous. In part, this is because social trust is subjective. People may feel different levels of trust even with the same experiences. The polls do indicate that most people feel that society is less trustworthy than in the past. The decline in social trust began, like the other parts of social capital, in the 1960s. Most of the decline can be attributed to generational change.

Some studies have posited a decline in civility that goes along with seeing a "generalized other." With a generalized other, trust and reciprocity are decreased. Violent aggressive driving has increased by more than 50 percent from 1990 to 1996 alone. Other studies have shown that more drivers ignore stop signs. The crime rate has also risen since the 1960s.

Section 2, Chapter 9, Against the Tide? Small Groups, Social Movements, and the Net

Section 2, Chapter 9, Against the Tide? Small Groups, Social Movements, and the Net Summary and Analysis

Of course, not all organizations have lost members. Those such as self-help groups, reading groups, and support groups illustrate a counter-trend in society. There are also a number of social movements that have swept across the country during the twentieth century as well. Small group studies indicate that about 40 percent of all Americans report being in a small group that meets regularly. Many of the groups are church related, but others participate in groups like Alcoholics Anonymous (AA). Members also often report receiving help from someone in their small group.

Reading groups became important in America during the middle of the nineteenth century. Most were made up of women. The groups often had a civic component as well, with the suffrage movement being an issue on which some groups focused. Informal reading groups seem to be on the increase again, although there is not the civic engagement in most cases. Although people appear to be participating, the number of single women and college graduates, the two most likely members, has also grown.

Self-help groups have grown in recent years. This includes groups like AA and Weight Watcher's. The groups often provide emotional support to individuals, and they may substitute for other intimate relationships that have fallen away in modern society. Divorced and single people are more likely to attend such groups than married people. The groups often bring social capital to individuals who might not otherwise have access to it. Some of the groups may also include broader civic engagement.

A number of social movements also developed in the 1960s and 1970s. Social activism was high during this time, and people were engaged in civic participation through them. Social movements can create social capital, as they often create new friendships and network connections. Social ties also tend to draw people into social movements, as with volunteering. Participants often find a shared identity, or at least the grassroots ones tend to. Professional social movements tend to produce less social capital, possibly because the connections are less intense.

With some of the social movement organizations, recruiting has become a science. Direct mailings have long been a favorite method. Yet, many people who donate may not consider themselves members or receive social capital benefits. For professional social movement organizations, commitment is minimal and often amounts to sending in a check. Many also don't have local chapters to bring people together regularly.

Putnam argues that churches have been involved in many grassroots movements over the last several decades. In addition, it appears that there has been a slight increase in protest and demonstration participation. Abortion appears to account for about one-third of those numbers. Protests often act in compliment to civic participation; protesters are often more involved than non-protesters.

Telecommunications is a third trend that Putnam looks at that doesn't correspond to the decline of other participation. The telephone has increased dramatically in society. By 1982, half of all Americans talked to another family member or friend daily via phone. By 1998, two-thirds of people called friends and relatives daily to talk. Telephones make people feel more connected, but it also decreases the face-to-face interactions that would otherwise take place. Yet, the phone seems to reinforce existing personal and social networks. It has helped schmoozing.

The internet also has the potential for widespread change in social capital, although scholars are still unsure of how it will play out. Internet users aren't any more or less likely to participate civically. It does help transmit information, which could make people feel connected, or it could replace other forms of social interaction. Virtual communities may be more egalitarian as well, and it may increase some forms of political behavior. However, it appears that for the internet to really help establish social capital, the relationships also need a face-to-face component.

Section 3: Chapter 10, Introduction

Section 3: Chapter 10, Introduction Summary and Analysis

Putnam argues that something important happened in the last part of the twentieth century. In the first part of the century, Americans became more active socially and politically. They gave more money to charities, participated in community projects, and attended club meetings. Then, they started to stop doing these things. In comparison to where America was half a century ago, America is less connected and less involved. While many people are "members" of organizations and associations, it is generally in name only.

Putnam wants to find common factors that may have led to these declines. None of the usual suspects stands out as a possible explanation. The declines hit almost every part of American society. While the levels of participation may differ across social categories, the trends are similar. Putnam thinks that the place to start may be education. It is an important factor in many forms of social engagement, such as voting, chairing a local committee, and club attendance.

Education may be important as showing ambition or an engagement in the community that comes with gained skills and resources. Yet, people are better educated today than in the past. This deepens the mystery of what is going on. It would be expected that higher education would lead to more participation in organizations. Engagement has decline even among the educated.

Any solution to the question must pass through several questions. First, does the factor relate civic engagement to social capital? Second, is the relationship spurious? Third, does the factor change in the expected way? Fourth, is the factor a result of the civic disengagement and not the cause?

Section 3: Chapter 11, Pressures of Time and Money

Section 3: Chapter 11, Pressures of Time and Money Summary and Analysis

Putnam argues that the most obvious answer in the decline is increasing busyness. Many people use this as their reason for not getting involved. Full-time workers often feel the most harried. In addition, job insecurity, economic pressures, and declining wages may also contribute to disengagement. Putnam, however, finds that finding evidence for these issues is difficult.

First, it's not clear that people today are working harder. The number of hours worked has remained about the same since the 1940s. Men actually seem to have more leisure time. In addition, many tasks around the home have become easier and faster to complete with new appliances and inventions. There is no evidence that Americans have less leisure time overall. Some of the new free time comes from earlier retirement. Less-educated workers have gained leisure time, but college-educated workers put in more hours now. Putnam suggests that maybe the people who have free time has shifted. Coordinating schedules has also become more difficult.

Yet, Putnam finds that time demands don't seem to lead directly to disengagement. People who are employed tend to be more engaged, and people with the heaviest time pressures are actually more likely to participate in civic and social organizations. One study even found that people with longer work hours are more likely to volunteer. Longer working hours doesn't cause greater involvement. One of the reasons why people feel busy is because of these commitments. The finding doesn't mean that if we just become busier that we will engage. The decline in engagement exists for people along all parts of the busyness spectrum as well.

If pressure doesn't answer the question, Putnam suggests that financial pressures are another factor that may give answers. Financial pressures rose during the period in question. Worries and pressure over finances do seem to have an effect on involvement. The Great Depression , for example, led to a big blip in the rise of social participation. Financial worries is associated with less time spent with friends and less volunteering. It is more anxiety over finances than income that seems to lead to a decline in social activities.

However, the decline in civic participation appears to have begun before the economic troubles. In addition, the decline happened among the rich and the poor. At best, financial anxiety would only account for about five to ten percent of the total decline in civic engagement.

Women have been going to work outside the home in greater numbers over the last half century. The percentage of women working outside the home doubled from the 1950s to the 1990s. This has several possible effects. It may increase potential connections with others, and it decreases the time available for those connections. In general, working people are more involved in their communities. For single moms, in particular, working outside the home increases civic participation. Yet, full-time employment does cut home entertaining and informal visiting with friends. So, work outside the home for women has both positive and negative effects on civic engagement.

Putnam suggests that it is also difficult to compare women who work outside the home and women who don't. The levels of participation in different areas of civic life may be related to why a woman chooses to work or not. Differences may also be related to the consequences of working or staying home. Women who work by choice are more likely to be involved in clubs and churches than those who have to work out of necessity. Women who work part-time are more likely to be involved than those working full-time. Working full-time seems to inhibit a woman's involvement, although this is mitigated if it is by choice.

Putnam says that he wants to be clear that working women are not to blame for the lack of civic participation. A woman's full-time employment doesn't decrease all forms of participation, either. He argues that women's full time employment and financial distress probably account for less than 10 percent of the change.

Section 3: Chapter 12, Mobility and Sprawl

Section 3: Chapter 12, Mobility and Sprawl Summary and Analysis

Americans have always been somewhat nomadic, moving around from place to place more frequently than people in some other countries. About 20 percent of people move in a given year. However, moving can disrupt the connections that a person has already made. Putnam argues that residential stability is a strong factor in whether a person participates in local organizations. People who have recently moved are less likely to vote and less likely to have strong connections with others. People who except to move in the near future attend church less and volunteer less. Homeowners tend to be more rooted and are more likely to be involved. Communities with high turnover rates typically have less social capital and are less integrated. In these communities, crime tends to be higher, and children do worse in school.

Putnam argues, however, that rising mobility doesn't explain civic disengagement. It has not increased in the last fifty years. It does appear that where a person moves to may have some connection, however. Suburbs have risen in popularity since the end of WWII, and while the homogeneous residents would seem to inspire civic engagement, this doesn't seem to be the case. The suburbs have increasingly become anonymous where people shop at impersonal malls. People frequently visit a number of suburbs or cities to get what they need, taking from them the dense social interactions that happen when a person uses one spot for their needs. People spend more time on their commutes and travel farther each way. Studies show that for each additional ten minutes in a commute, a person is ten percent less likely to be participating in civic affairs. This has also affected non-commuters, who are less likely to get involved if those around them have increased commutes.

Why does sprawl affect civic engagement? First, sprawl takes up more time as people commute places alone, giving people less time to be involved. It is also related to increased social segregation, which also reduces the likelihood of involvement. Finally, it interferes with connectedness in a community. People with dense social connections are more likely to be involved, but sprawl encourages less dense ones. Putnam argues that sprawl probably accounts for about ten percent of the overall decline in civic engagement.

Section 3: Chapter 13, Technology and Mass Media

Section 3: Chapter 13, Technology and Mass Media Summary and Analysis

Technology had a huge impact on life in the twentieth century. Putnam suggests that two effects on the influx of technology may play a role in civic disenfranchisement. First, entertainment and news have become more individualized; we can now pick and choose what we want to hear and see instead of having to go with the masses. We can also consume our news and entertainment alone via the television or internet. Whereas entertainment used to bring people together, now most people have it available to them in their homes.

Reading the newspaper is one sign of civic engagement. Readers tend to be older and more rooted to the communities in which they live. Those who read are more engaged than those who watch the news on television. Readers are more likely to attend local meetings, belong to more organizations, vote frequently, and volunteer more. However, readership has been decreasing in recent years. The decline appears to be because of generational succession. Interest in the news is also on the decline. Even watching the news on television, still a predictor of involvement, is also declining.

Television may also affect a person's civic engagement. The average American spends about four hours per day watching TV. Many households have multiple sets, which allows for even more solitude. Putnam argues that the biggest consequence of the television is that it has brought people home. Habitual viewers are less likely to be involved than are selective viewers.

The change in civic engagement occurred about the time that television began taking over Americans' lives. The more a person watches, the less likely s/he is to be involved. However, Putnam warns that it may be that civic disengagement leads to watching more television than the other way around. People who say that the TV is their number one form of entertainment are less likely to volunteer or participate in organizations. While Putnam can't prove that the TV caused the decline, there is evidence that makes it seem likely to have had a hand in it. The changes occurred at about the same time—with civic engagement declining as TV viewership increased. There are also several studies which examined a single community before and after TV was introduced. The studies found that television decreased civic engagement in these places.

Putnam argues that television probably contributes to the decline because it competes for valuable time. He also suggests that it may have psychological effects that inhibit participation and undermine motivations for civic participation. TV not only takes time, but it encourages passivity and lethargy.

Section 3: Chapter 14, From Generation to Generation

Section 3: Chapter 14, From Generation to Generation Summary and Analysis

All the factors considered so far as reasons for civic disengagement have been inconclusive. They all probably contribute to civic disengagement, but they don't fully explain it. Age is one factor that could be a predictor. Civic engagement is not equal across age groups and it is second to education in terms of predicting civic engagement. Older individuals are much more likely to be engaged than younger people.

To understand if age is a contributor, Putnam argues that both life cycle patterns and generational effects have to be considered. Life cycle patterns would lead to less involvement at certain points in time as demands piled up and people had less time. Various forms of civic engagement peak at different periods of time in the average person's life. For example, participation in sports clubs happens mainly among youth. However, Putnam argues that higher rates of senior civic engagement don't fit the expected pattern of life cycle engagement. Up until the 1950s and 1960s, civic engagement declined as a person reached their senior years; now, it is likely to rise.

When all forms of civic engagement are examined, the pattern is striking. Disengagement is greater for young people and less for individuals born before WWII. This suggests that the decline in civic participation is a generational difference. The generation born and raised before WWII has been more engaged in civic affairs throughout their lives, but succeeding generations have not been. The findings indicate that growing up after WWII was a different experience than growing up before it.

If the roots of the civic disengagement occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, why did it take longer for the effects to show? First, the boom in college education gave a civic boost. This also gave time for the earlier cohort to gain in numbers and power, showing more civic engagement. However, as time passed, the civic generation started to lose individuals and the replacing numbers of younger individuals were not as interested in civic affairs.

The baby boomers were born after WWII, between 1946 and 1964. They experienced more affluence and the introduction of television. The group lived through the civil rights movement, the Kennedy and King assassinations as well as events such as the Vietnam War and Watergate. It wouldn't be surprising given this if they were more distrusting of the government and alienated from involvement in politics. Many of the boomers rejected religion and were more likely to see individualism as a good thing. They are more individual and self-sufficient than previous generations.

Although the trend started before they were born, Generation X'ers are often blamed for the decline. In many ways, they do seem to follow in the paths of the baby boomers before them. Gen X'ers have continued the emphasis on the individual and material goods.

Along with a decline in civic participation, studies show that the characteristics of the last two generations have contributed to higher depression and suicide rates. They have also experienced more headaches, sleeplessness, and digestion problems. Contentment with life has also declined. Americans at mid-century were happier and better adjusted that Americans at the end of the century. Some scholars argue that social isolation may be causing these issues. Americans spend more time alone now than they did in the past.

Generation succession has not created an equal decline in civic participation. The decline in forms of schmoozing occurs to all age groups and is more than likely a society-wide change. The decline in attending club meetings, volunteering, and sending greeting card is more than likely generational succession. Putnam argues that the dynamics of civic participation are influenced by social values and habits that were probably shaped by WWII.

Section 3: Chapter 15, What Killed Civic Engagement? Summing Up

Section 3: Chapter 15, What Killed Civic Engagement? Summing Up Summary and Analysis

In this chapter, Putnam reviews additional evidence and arguments for what caused the decline in civic engagement. First, the structure of the American family changed and the decline in civic engagement happened at about the same time. Evidence does show that family bonds are less strong now than in the past, but these aspects probably haven't contributed much to the overall decline in civic engagement.

Putnam also looks at race as a possible reason. The decline occurred just after the civil rights movement in the 1960s. However, racial differences in organizational membership are small and all races have been affected by the decline in social capital. Finally, it would be difficult to reconcile the generational difference to white flight. Racism, then, probably doesn't account for the change either.

Some people have argued that the decline has to do with big government and the growth of the welfare state. Putnam agrees that some policies probably have contributed to the decline in social capital in some areas. Regentrification policies in some areas have meant that existing communities were broken up, harming the social capital in the area. When looking at other countries, social capital appears to be highest in larger welfare states, like those in Scandinavia.

If big government isn't the cause, some have suggested that it is big business, the market, and capitalism. Theorists such as Karl Marx have long argued that capitalism would be society's downfall. However, Putnam argues that capitalism and the market have been around for centuries. However, the globalization of the market may be more of a factor. National chains have replaced small, locally owned shops.

Putnam feels that financial pressures have contributed to no more than ten percent of the decline in civic engagement. Suburbanization and sprawl probably account for another ten percent. Electronic entertainment may factor in as much as twenty-five percent of the decline. Generational change is the largest factor, accounting for probably about half. Generational change and the effects of television seem to overlap somewhat, but this might account for fifteen percent of the overall total. Putnam states the estimates are just estimates and that each might play a role differently depending the exact form of social capital and civic engagement. He also suggests that the full picture is not known; there may be other factors that have influenced the decline of which people are unaware.

Section 4: Chapter 16, Introduction

Section 4: Chapter 16, Introduction Summary and Analysis

Putnam argues that on almost every factor, social capital has declined over the last two generations. Most Americans already know that something has been happening. They feel the changing bonds. Studies suggest that being connected in the civic realm makes people healthier and wealthier, and it is much easier to live with social capital than without it.

Social capital creates a way for people to deal with collective problems and issues. If no one does the work, everyone is worse off than if everyone had pitched in. Things such as limiting water usage and paying taxes are examples of the "free-rider" problem. Social norms and ways of enforcing them are often the best ways of handing these challenges. Social capital also allows communities to run better and more smoothly. When people trust each other, everything operates more easily because people don't have to spend the time examining the interactions and exchanges. Social capital also helps people see that their fates are linked to others. The networks of social capital bring helpful information, and an individual's psychological and physical health are better through these links to others.

Section 4: Chapter 17, Eduction and Children's Welfare

Section 4: Chapter 17, Eduction and Children's Welfare Summary and Analysis

Social capital is a strong factor in child development. Networks, trust, and reciprocity all affect a child's development and opportunities. Putnam finds that in states with a high social capital rank, children are better off. Things such as teenage pregnancy, school dropouts, violent crime, and premature death all happen less frequently in these states. This doesn't mean that social capital causes good outcomes, but it does seem to be associated with them.

Children in high-risk areas are more vulnerable to social capital deficits. Yet, Putnam argues that social capital may be most important for such children and families. Inner city kids with higher levels of social capital were less depressed than those in less tightly-knit areas. School performance is also linked to social capital. The level of informal social capital appears to have a greater influence than formal social capital on student achievement.

How is social connectedness related to student achievement? The answers aren't entirely clear, but Putnam says that there are hints. In places with higher social capital, parents are more involved in their kids' education, and kids are more likely to study than to engage in violence. Students also seem to spend less time watching TV in areas with higher social capital. The more a community is involved in its schools, the better students do.

Even within schools, social capital plays a role. Smaller schools encourage more face-to-face interactions and activities, getting both parents and children more involved and increasing the social capital. Religious schools often benefit from smaller sizes, many extracurricular activities for students, and a higher quality of teacher-student relationships. Trust is often a major component of these schools.

Some cities are working to build more social capital in their schools. Schools are increasingly urging parental involvement in decision making. They've found that increasing the trust between parents, educators, principals, and students can have positive effects. Teachers in schools where more trust is present tend to reach out to parents more and to look to innovate approaches to teaching. They also have a deep sense of responsibility for helping the children succeed.

Social capital is also important within families for child development. Close bonds within families and ideas of reciprocity benefit children. Parents who attend school functions and help with homework are more likely to have kids with higher grade point averages.

When parents, particularly mothers, have strong social networks, children are more likely to graduate and go to college.

Section 4: Chapter 18, Safe and Productive Neighborhoods

Section 4: Chapter 18, Safe and Productive Neighborhoods Summary and Analysis

Social capital also benefits neighborhoods. Higher social capital often means cleaner spaces, friendlier people, and less crime. Scholars have long wondered why some areas seemed to have less crime and vandalism than others. They found that areas with less social participation and more anonymity were more likely to see these negative issues. Studies are pretty straight forward on one issues: higher social capital equals less crime.

States with higher social capital tend to be more rural, more educated, and wealthier. Social capital also helps predict the rate of homicide. In fact, it is more important in this prediction than education and income inequality. Putnam suggests that the higher rates of violence in Southern states may be due to lower social capital.

Part of the inner city crisis, according to Putnam, is declining social capital. Mutual trust and altruism often determine whether an area will be higher in crime or not. Some studies have shown that participation in organizations can decrease crime. Family social capital can also affect neighborhoods. Stable families can provide models and positive social capital for those around them.

Putnam suggests that gangs may be a sort of misguided attempt to build social capital, particularly in places where institutions are lacking. They often include ideas of reciprocity and trust to maintain the solidarity of the gang. Most inner cities, however, have some forms of social capital. People work and most students are in school. There are often rich social connections within many of the ethnic communities. There may also be high levels of trust among community members. However, some studies have suggested that the social networks are not as dense in recent years.

Section 4: Chapter 19, Economic Prosperity

Section 4: Chapter 19, Economic Prosperity Summary and Analysis

Areas high in social capital are good places to get ahead. Many studies show that when people trust each other and social networks are strong, everyone in those networks and area has a greater likelihood of succeeding as well.

Individually, life changes are affected by social capital and connections. The connections that one has can make or break someone. These ties can influence who gets a job, promotion, and other benefits on the job. People within social networks have greater access to letters of recommendation, advice, and job leads. Social capital also affects economics. Studies have shown that institutions and social networks can be put to good use by unemployed people, when these factors are available. Immigrant networks can provide help and money for individuals who want to start businesses. Unemployed individuals often use social networks first in looking for jobs and about one-half find jobs through friends and family members. Some scholars have argued that the connections in an executive's Rolodex are as important, if not more, than degrees and experience.

Scholars also note that where networks are most needed are often where they are lacking. People living in extreme poverty many not have as many ties as even people living in low-poverty. People can also end up staying in poverty because they lack the connections that could help them get out, even when they had the necessary experience and skills for a higher paying job. People living in economically-disadvantaged places often lack both the material resources and the social resources to get ahead.

Social capital can be a double-edged sword, however. Scholars have also noted that in some ethnic communities, social capital can be both a positive and a negative as it can gain people more resources, but cost them some of those resources when others take advantage. Strong networks can also be exploited by people looking to make an easy profit. Companies such as Amway rely on people to recruit others into the business and to sell products to their friends and family. On the whole though, social capital benefits individuals in a range of ways, even if it does carry a few potential negatives.

Social capital can also help neighborhoods and countries gain wealth as well. Higher social capital can help keep housing values high in some areas and strong organizations can develop to help residents. Some commentators believe that economies which feature high trust among the citizens will prosper over the next century. Social capital, along with the trust and reciprocity that can develop, can lead to greater innovation and productivity as well as mutual learning.

Section 4: Chapter 20, Health and Happiness

Section 4: Chapter 20, Health and Happiness Summary and Analysis

Perhaps the most important consequence of social capital is health and happiness. Studies on this topic can be traced back as far as Emile Durkheim's work on suicide. He found that suicide can be predicted by how integrated one is into society. From his findings, suicide is rarer among married people and tight knit communities and higher when social change disrupts the social fabric. In more recent years, scholars have linked social capital to almost every aspect of health. The more socially connected people are, the better their health and the less likely they are to have heart attacks, depression, and premature death. Social capital can be as positive for health as high blood pressure, smoking, and inactivity are negatives.

Scholars aren't entirely sure why social connectedness has such a great effect on health. It may be that it gives assistance such as money or transportation to people, reducing stress. Connections may also encourage and reinforce healthy habits. Finally, some scholars think that social connectedness may actually stimulate the immune system to better fight disease and stress. A number of studies show that social isolation has negatives effects on health.

One interesting point coming from the studies on social connectedness is that if a person belongs to no clubs, but joins one, that person cuts the risk of death that year by half. However, people are participating less, which could potentially have devastating effects on Americans' health. At the same time that civic engagement began declining, rates of suicide and depression started rising. People without close friends and support systems experience more loneliness, more problems with sleeping, and lower self-esteem. It's not surprising then that many Americans say the key to their happiness is good relationships. Studies have shown that the best predictor of happiness is a person's social connections.

However, there is such a thing as too much of a good thing. Studies also show that there's a margin of social interaction which brings happiness. The biggest return on social participation seems to be appear to be between "never" and "once a month." Studies show little gain in happiness for more frequent volunteering or attending club meetings.

Section 4: Chapter 21, Democracy

Section 4: Chapter 21, Democracy Summary and Analysis

Democracy depends on citizens' civic participation. Some argue that the health of public institutions depends on participation as well through voluntary organizations. These organizations, from churches to grassroots political parties, let individuals express themselves and to keep the government in check. These networks provide people with a way to get political information and discuss it. When people join together, their voices become louder and their concerns are taken notice of. These organizations are also often the places where people learn to be citizens and gain the skills needed to participate. They may learn to lead, give speeches, and organize tasks. Churches and voluntary organizations may be the best places to learn these skills.

Associations provide places for people to discuss what is going on in the country, and they can teach people civic virtues. However, not all voluntary organizations may be good for society. Groups such as the KKK are antidemocratic. Voluntary organizations may also benefit the people who already have wealth and power then most in the political arena. These associations are not good just because they exist, and not everyone will be a better person for participating. They also cannot cure society alone. Without the presence of social capital, politics take on different meanings. It becomes "politics at a distance."

Social capital influences what goes into and what comes out of politics. If people demand better government, they generally find it. When people are engaged politically and civically, they are more likely to expect, and get, better government. When individuals are involved, governments work more efficiently and more crimes get solved.

Section 4: Chapter 22, The Dark Side of Social Capital

Section 4: Chapter 22, The Dark Side of Social Capital Summary and Analysis

Social capital isn't all positive, however. Putnam asks whether social capital is in conflict with liberty and equality. The classic argument has been that community ties restrict citizens' freedom and encourages intolerance. America in the 1950s had high social capital in many places, but many argue that it also created divisions and conformity. America has become more tolerant over the last half century, which happened at the same time that social capital and connectedness were declining.

Putnam argues that social joiners and activists are more tolerant of difference and dissent. Religious intolerance may be an exception to this, but it holds true for most others. Citizens of high social capital states are also more tolerant overall. Putnam suggests that both changes in social engagement and tolerance may be due to generational change. The most tolerant and engaged cohort tends to be those born from 1940-1945.

Some have also argued that social capital is in conflict with equality. Social capital can connect us to other people like us, which can reinforce stratification. It may be that social inequality is a part of social capital; however, Putnam argues that we shouldn't have to choose between equality and social capital. In fact, the states that have the highest social capital also have the greatest equality in economics and the civic arena.

Social capital may also be at war with itself. Putnam suggests that it is most easily created when it comes into being because of opposition to something else. Social capital happens most naturally when it takes place in groups of people who are like each other. Whether bonding or bridging capital is best can be a tough decision. Putnam argues that while reaching out is often met with connections, it is possible that bonding social capital could keep someone from forming bridging capital and vice versa. It may depend on the situation.

Section 5: Chapter 23, Lessons of History: The Gilded Age and the Progressive Era

Section 5: Chapter 23, Lessons of History: The Gilded Age and the Progressive Era Summary and Analysis

Putnam asks whether America can do anything about the deficit in social capital or whether it is just a result of modernity. He argues that part of the answer may be found in history, in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Some of the problems that now exist were foreshadowed then. Indeed, almost a century ago, America had another period of dramatic change that made portions of existing social capital obsolete. Yet, Americans fixed those problems, showing a way to approach today's issues.

One of the ways that society came to grips with the changes was through an increase in associations. Americans built on the foundation already in place, adding relevant social groups to the mix, such as college sororities and fraternities and boys' clubs. New types of groups and associations sprung up everywhere. Many of the civic organizations around today were founded during this time period. The groups provided social connections as well as material benefits. The Progressives also sought to strengthen social capital, although they called it something different. They sought to establish parks, museums, kindergartens, and playgrounds. Women's reading groups started taking on a political color as they fought for suffrage and safe drinking water. Labor unions sought to improve working conditions. The Progressive Era wasn't without its troubles, however. Jim Crow became legalized in 1896, and the KKK was strong during the time period. Racial segregation was high and tolerance was low.

Putnam argues that America needs a period of inventiveness like the Gilded Age and Progressive Era. America needs to find organizations that are meaningful and relevant to the changes that have occurred.

Section 5, Chapter 24, Toward an Agenda for Social Capitalists

Section 5, Chapter 24, Toward an Agenda for Social Capitalists Summary and Analysis

Putnam states that re-creating social capital won't be easy. A national crisis or disaster might ease the transformation, but that's not something for which one wishes. People notice that social capital is weak, even if they do not know exactly what is happening. Naming the problem is only the first step, however. People need to create new structures to get people involved again. Innovative ways have to be sought and individuals have to act.

Putnam challenges America to find ways of re-engaging the public to match what the people in the Progressive Era did. He believes that the ways in which people will do this will be different now, but that it can still be done. One piece may be improved civics classes in schools, teaching children how to be involved and participate. Extracurricular activities may be another way of fostering participation in the youth of society. Funding has been cut for many across the country, but studies show that they improve participation. The internet may also be an avenue to get people involved. The changing character of the workforce and workplace will mean that different strategies have to be employed. Studies show that family and community oriented workplaces may also benefit employers, which could be useful for everyone. Companies should foster workplace social capital. Urban designers can focus on creating communities that offer more social capital. Religious communities can continue to foster small groups and bonding social capital. A revival, although a mixed blessing, might also do much to increase social capital.

The mass media have an important position. They can be used to foster social capital, but the trends have to change in the ways that media are used. People need to spend less time alone with mass media. The internet may be used to foster bonds in face-to-face communities and to get people talking about politics. The political arena and government also need to change. Focus should be on building social capital.

Characters

American Society

In Bowling Alone, Putnam argues that American society is declining in civic participation and social capital. He points out the fewer members participate socially now as compared to the middle of the twentieth century. The lowered participation has led to an increase in social problems such as suicide, depression, crime, and health issues. He believes that this decline in social capital is explained largely by generational succession and argues that American society can change the course that it is on and improve social capital.

Civic engagement has long been a part of American society. As a democracy, people have been expected to be involved in their nation and communities by voting and participating in political discussions. Religious and other voluntary organizations have often been the lifeblood of American society by providing social connections and helping those who need it. However, social capital hasn't always been strong. It has waxed and waned throughout American's history. Putnam argues that the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era saw Americans step up when they saw social capital declining. These individuals created new organizations and groups to bolster social capital.

Putnam argues that American society today needs to do the same to combat the problems that have been developing over the last fifty years. The last several generations have been more focused on the individual than the collective and have not been involved to the same degree that previous generations have been. Materialism has also increased. Putnam believes that American society can take the lessons of the Progressive Era and turn society around for the better.

Americans in the First Half of the Twentieth Century

Putnam argues that Americans in the first half of the twentieth century were more engaged in civic affairs than individuals in the second half of the century. In the last section of the book, he discusses the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These individuals also faced great social change and innovation, as well as a decline in social capital. They responded by creating new clubs, organizations, and groups to provide the social capital that society needed. Putnam argues that these individuals should provide an example for people today to follow in curing the decline in social capital that is occurring now.

In the second half of the century, individuals who were born before WWII are more likely to be socially engaged. They are more likely to be involved politically, volunteer, attend church, and attend club meetings. The death of more and more of these individuals has made the decline in social capital more apparent. People born between 1910 and 1940,

represent a group that is more engaged in their communities and more trusting than individuals who were born after them.

Americans at Mid-Century

The peak in social capital during the twentieth century occurred at mid-century. Americans then had just come out of the second world war, and America was booming. The economy was strong, and parents began welcoming in the baby boom generation. People were happier and suffered fewer health issues than today. During the middle of the century, more people were engaged in civic affairs than ever before. This was largely the legacy of the Progressive Era, when people created new organizations to increase social capital. During the mid-century, television came to American households and suburbs were developed, two factors which help lead to the decline in social capital.

The average American at mid-century voted, attended club meetings and religious services, and was generally trusting of other people. They volunteered, gave money to charities, and were members of organizations such as the PTA, Lion's Club, and unions. Individuals who were born during the 1950s and 1960s are considered part of the baby boom. This generation has been more individually focused and less likely to be engaged in civic affairs.

Americans in the Last Half of the Twentieth Century

Putnam shows that social capital has declined in the last half of the twentieth century. Americans are participating less in civic and other organizations. The decline in social capital has led to more health problems, including an increase in suicide and depression. Americans are also experiencing more social isolation from each other and more loneliness. Individuals are spending more time in solitary activities, such as watching television and commuting long distances to work each day.

The average American is less likely to vote, attend club meetings, volunteer, or give money to charity than in earlier times. This is particularly true for younger Americans than for older Americans. Some groups such as small groups, self-help groups, and social movements have seen increased numbers however, offering a degree of social capital to those who participate. Americans born during the second half of the century are more likely to be focused on the individual and material goods. Putnam argues that it is up to this generation to make changes in society that will increase social capital. He believes that Americans have to recreate social capital by creating new types of organizations and ways of participating in civic life.

Americans During the Great Depression

Putnam writes that civic engagement decreased during the Great Depression. This was the only significant dip in involvement during the first half of the century. Putnam believes that the decrease in engagement during this time may be related to increased

financial worries and anxiety. He writes that studies have shown that anxiety over money can cause a larger drop in engagement than actual loss of income.

Working Women

Putnam examines whether some of the decline in civic participation is related to the increasing numbers of women in the workforce. He argues that working women get both benefits and obstacles to civic participation from working. One study showed that women who work by choice are more likely to stay involved than those who work out of necessity. Further, part time workers are more engaged than those working full time. Yet, work does allow women to make connections that they might not otherwise make. Putnam suggests that working women and financial anxiety account for only ten percent in the decline of civic participation.

Suburbanites

Putnam argues that the sprawl associated with suburbs has contributed to the overall decline in civic engagement. Individuals who live in suburbs often face longer commute times and are more likely to use multiple suburbs/cities in their daily lives. Both of these things decrease the likelihood of civic engagement. Suburbanites can have less dense social networks because of sprawl and the disruptions to social life that it causes.

Schmoozers

Schmoozers are people who spend time in informal conversation, according to the Yiddish term. Schmoozers have an active social life, but their participation tends to be more informal. Examples of schmoozing are getting together with friends, talking to family members, and attending social events. Schmoozers are more common in America than machers. Schmoozing has also declined in the United States since mid-century.

Machers

Machers is the Yiddish terms for people who make things occur in the community. These people tend to spend a great deal of time in formal organizations. They are more likely to volunteer, attend club meetings, read the newspaper, and follow politics. They also tend to be more highly educated and have higher incomes. Putnam argues that machers have declined in society.

Baby Boomers

Putnam argues that the decline in social capital began with the baby boom generation. This generation has been focused more on the individual than the previous generation.

Baby boomers are less likely to get involved in clubs, attend religious services, vote, or volunteer than older Americans.

Generation X

The decline that began with the baby boomers has increased as Gen X'ers have come of age. Individuals from Generation X have been even more focused on the individual and have also been more materialistic. They are less likely to attend meetings, vote, volunteer, give to charities, and trust others than older Americans.

Objects/Places

Social Capital

Social capital is the fellowship, social intercourse, and good will that occurs from a social unit. It is both a private good and a public good.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is giving to another, without knowing when or if the favor will be returned. Putnam argues that this is an important part of social capital.

Bonding Social Capital

This type of social capital is more inward looking and creates exclusive groups. Examples may include country clubs and fraternal organizations.

Bridging Social Capital

Bridging social capital looks outward and brings together people from diverse social positions.

Small Groups

Small groups, such as reading groups and self-help groups, appear to be weathering the decline better than other types. Self-help groups, in particular, appear to have added members over the last half century. These groups may provide support and social capital to individuals who may not have other ways of getting it.

Telecommunications

Communicating via the telephone or over the internet is somewhat of a double-edged sword. While this type of communication has remained popular, it does cut down on face-to-face interactions. It is unclear what the long term effects of telecommunications will be on society.

Financial Anxiety

Putnam argues that financial pressures, particularly anxiety about finances, accounts for about ten percent of the overall decline in civic participation. He also ties in the growth

of women in the workforce, arguing that women who have to work out of necessity are less likely to participate in civic affairs.

Sprawl

The sprawl caused by the growth of suburbs accounts for about ten percent in the decline of civic engagement, according to Putnam. This sprawl takes time away from civic affairs and interferes with a community's boundedness.

The Mass Media

Putnam argues that television might account for about twenty-five percent of the overall decline in social connectedness and participation. He argues that television is a solitary activity that increases passivity and lethargy and that it takes time away from other activities, including civic engagement.

Generational Change

Putnam argues that generational change accounts for about half of the decline in civic participation. The generations after WWII have focused more on the individual and have been less active in civic affairs than the generation born and raised before WWII.

The Gilded Age and Progressive Era

Americans in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century also experienced a decline in social capital. They responded by forming new organizations and ways of participating to increase it again. Putnam argues that they can serve as an example to Americans today.

Themes

Social Capital

One of the major themes in Bowling Alone is social capital. Putnam states that the term has been coined to refer to the way social bonds make people's lives more productive. This includes aspects such as fellowship, social interaction, sympathy, and social support. It has also been used to refer to social networks, which indicate that it is often who one knows and not what one knows when searching for a job or fulfilling other needs. Social capital for Putnam is both a private good and a public good, benefiting individuals, communities, and nations.

Putnam argues that social capital has declined in the second half of the twentieth century. People are engaging less in society and participating less in civic affairs. Social networks and acts such as volunteering, giving money, and trusting others have decreased. He believes that this decline is due to a range of factors, including generational succession, sprawl, financial anxiety, and the television. These factors have led to a society that is deficient in social capital.

The effects of lower social capital can be devastating for individuals and communities. It is associated with lower health, more crime, less trust, and more isolation. In contrast, areas high in social capital often witness children who do better in schools, safer neighborhoods, better health for individuals, more efficient governments, and greater wealth. In other words, the lack of social capital has contributed to many of the social problems of modern society. However, Putnam believes that society can work to create higher levels of social capital.

Civic Engagement

Putnam makes the argument in the book that civic engagement has declined in the second half of the twentieth century. People are less involved in politics and social affairs than they were earlier in the century. This includes actions such as voting, attending town meetings, and being involved in local politics. The increasing social isolation that people are experiencing is decreasing the social capital that they have, according to Putnam.

Civic engagement is the bedrock of democracy. The idea of a government by the people and for the people only works if people participate in the process. As Putnam points out, governments are better when people are involved in them and holding them to a high standard. When people are involved, they understand the political process better, hold leaders more accountable for their actions, and are in a better position to make the changes that are needed.

Without civic engagement, society is losing many of the social networks and connections that once kept it strong. Declining social capital has led to more crime and

a democracy that works less efficiently than it could. Although changes can be made, Putnam acknowledges that it won't be easy for people to increase social capital. In part, people will have to actively participate in the civic arena to make changes in their communities and in the government.

Social Connections

In many ways, Bowling Alone is about the social connections that people have with each other. Putnam argues that these connections have been declining in recent years, as Americans become more isolated and individually orientated. He believes that this has led to worse health, more depression, more suicide, more unhappiness, and less trust in others. The decrease in social connections has also led to a decrease in social capital, which has had negative effects on communities and families as well.

As humans, the social connections people have with each other are important. Whether an individual is wealthy or living in poverty, social connections can provide resources and help when needed. Putnam states that social networks can help people get jobs, promotions, and other benefits. In addition, social connections help people when they are sick or in need of something else. Most people believe that their social relationships are the most important factor in their happiness. It is clear that social connections are an important part of individuals' lives.

Putnam believes that in order to create a better society, people need to recreate the social connections in their lives. These connections may not look the same that they did at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly because society has changed so much since then; however, the increasing social problems and disconnect, signal that people need to begin looking for ways to become more involved and make connections with others.

Style

Perspective

Robert D. Putnam is a professor of public policy at Harvard University. He has written six other books, including Making Democracy Work, The Beliefs of Politicians, and Hanging Together. This work came out of Putnam's work on democracy in Italy. In Making Democracy Work, he argued that democracy depends on social capital. He began to wonder how this would apply to American society and began looking at related statistics.

Putnam appears to believe that a decline has been occurring in social capital, even before beginning this project. However, he is not alone in this idea and the statistics appear to back up Putnam's hypothesis. He does not appear to have any other biases that overtly affect the work. Putnam draws extensively on the research of others to show that a decline has occurred and what may have caused it. It is possible that he disregarded studies that did not support his facts, but Putnam also consulted with many other scholars on the project. These scholars would probably have identified any obvious biases.

Tone

The tone that Putnam takes in Bowling Alone is one of an objective authority. Although he leaves room for alternative explanations for the problem, he presents an authoritative argument that a decline is happening in social capital and civic participation. The tone encourages readers to accept the arguments that Putnam makes. The extensiveness of Putnam's argument and research present him as an expert on the topic that readers should trust.

Putnam is writing for an adult audience, although he is targeting not only academics but also the general public. While this works on some levels, the complexity and length of the topic probably prevent a large percentage of the population from reading the book. The topic and complexity of the argument probably appeal to a small percentage of the general public, although the book has been popular in some circles.

The overall tone of Bowling Alone works well. Given the complexity of the topic and argument, the work needs a strong authoritative voice to carry the reader through and make the arguments understandable. Putnam presents information from many different fields that has been collected by other experts. This bolsters his overall argument. Putnam also leaves room open for other explanations. He clearly states that there may be other factors involved in the change, but does so in a way that does not undermine the authoritative voice. This makes Putnam appear as if he is open to other explanations, but that he has exhausted the possible known factors in his study.

Structure

Putnam structures Bowling Alone into twenty-four chapters, separated into five different sections. He also includes several appendixes, notes, and an index. In the first section of the book, Putnam introduces the topic and defines the important factors and terminology. In the second section, Putnam examines the evidence to show that civic participation and social capital have declined in American society since the 1950s and 1960s. In the third section, Putnam considers some of the potential causes of the decline and presents evidence about these causes. In the fourth section, he writes of the effects of the decline in social capital in society. Finally, in the fifth section, he suggests some solutions to the problem.

The structure of Bowling Alone works well to help keep the various parts of Putnam's argument organized. The flow moves from one piece of the problem to another in a clear and logical way. Putnam moves from describing the problem to showing the various components of the problem to discussing the factors that may have caused the problem. He also addresses why the problem is important, showing evidence that social capital brings much into Americans' lives when it is present and creates problems when it is not. He also discusses some of the possible solutions to the problem of a decline in civic engagement. All together, the argument is thorough, and Putnam structures it in such as way that it is logical and organized.

Quotes

"Our national myths often exaggerate the role of the individual heroes and understate the importance of collective effort." Chapter 1, pg. 24

"It is emphatically not my view that community bonds in America have weakened steadily throughout our history—or even throughout the last hundred years. On the contrary, American history carefully examined is a story of ups and downs in civic engagement, not just downs—a story of collapse and of renewal." Chapter 1, pg. 25

"Participation in politics is increasingly based on the checkbook, as money replaces time." Chapter 2, pg. 40

"In other words, the more that my activities depend on the actions of others, the greater the drop-off in my participation." Chapter 2, pg. 45

"What really matters from the point of view of social capital and civic engagement is not merely nominal membership, but active and involved membership." Chapter 3, pg. 58

"Churches provide an important incubator for civic skills, civic norms, community interests, and civic recruitment." Chapter 4, pg. 66

"For better or worse, we rely increasingly—we are forced to rely increasingly—on formal institutions, and above all on the law, to accomplish what we used to accomplish through informal networks reinforced by generalized reciprocity—that is, through social capital." Chapter 8, pg. 147

"We remain interested and critical spectators of the public scene. We kibitz, but we don't play. We maintain a facade of formal affiliations, but we rarely show up. We have invented new ways of expressing our demands that demand less of us." Chapter 10, pg. 183

"To sum up: Much of the decline of civic engagement in America during the last third of the twentieth century is attributable to the replacement of an unusually civic generation by several generations (their children and grandchildren) that are less embedded in community life." Chapter 14, pg. 275

"Does social capital have salutary effects on individuals, communities, or even entire nations? Yes, an impressive and growing body of research suggests that civic connections help make us healthy, wealthy, and wise." Chapter 16, pg. 287

"The performance of our democratic institutions depends in measurable ways upon social capital." Chapter 21, pg. 349

"Television, two-career families, suburban sprawl, generational changes in values—these and other changes in American society have meant that fewer and fewer of us find that the League of Women Voters, or the United Way, or the Shriners, or the

monthly bridge club, or even a Sunday picnic with friends fits the way we have come to live." Chapter 23, pg. 367

"In the end, however, institutional reform will not work—indeed, it will not happen—unless you and I, along with our fellow citizens, resolve to become reconnected with our friends and neighbors." Chapter 24, pg. 414

Topics for Discussion

Putnam wrote Bowling Alone before the events of 9/11. In the last section, he suggested that a national disaster or war could lead to a rise in social capital. Do you think that 9/11 and the Iraq War brought about more social capital in America? Why or why not?

What are the factors that Putnam believes led to the decline in social capital in the twentieth century? Do you agree with him that generational change has had the largest effect?

Do you believe that social isolation has risen in American society? Why or why not?

How does Putnam believe that Americans should solve the deficit in social capital? What do you think Americans should do to increase social participation?

Compare your social participation with that of an older relative or friend from an earlier generation. Do you think that you are more or less socially engaged than your relative/friend? Why?

Putnam believes that the television is partly to blame for the decline in social capital. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Do you think society was better or worse in other parts of the twentieth century as compared to today? Are there aspects that have improved in the late twentieth century? What has gotten worse?