

Bowling Alone
Robert Putnam

There are reviews enough for anybody that wants them. This isn't so much a review as an essay.

In the decades since *Bowling Alone* was published one of the things that has come to world attention is the declining birth rates of every advanced country. These include Caucasian and Northern Asian populations everywhere.

It takes 2.1 children per woman to sustain a population. We are far from that, the numbers ranging from 1.2 children per adult woman in Korea up around the almost 2 in New Zealand. For whites in the US it is 1.6. Already more white people dying than being born, and the imbalance will be more pronounced as the boomers die off.

The phenomenon that is not measured is cultural transmission. We are doing an even worse job of making our children like ourselves than having them in the first place. This relates closely to social capital, Putnam's theme. Obviously culture and people go together. If people don't reproduce their culture, they're going to fail in reproducing themselves. Look at the situation of the American Indians. As long as they were tribal, each successive generation of Indians was taught by the tribal elders to be a just like Indians before them. That's what perpetuating their civilization meant. In the time that they've been on reservations, their civilization has fallen apart. They may be able to have kids, but they are not reproducing a viable society. They basically could not live without the land that they be given as reservations and without handouts from the government. The same is true of other seemingly self-perpetuating groups, such as the underclass in the cities. It may be true that they numerically reproduce themselves, but it's an artificial, unsustainable reproduction because they don't have the means to be self-supporting without help from the productive members of society, redistributed via the government.

Each generation has to make an investment in forming the rising generation to be like them. We used to do this terms of religious belief, civic belief in the American project, involvement in the parents' occupation such as farming or whatever, apprenticeships and so on. Sons were like fathers.

We have abandoned that. We've given the formation of our children over to civil servants, teachers for the most part. Parents don't spend that much time with their children and are isolated from them. Children have a different culture, one largely formed by television. It is not designed to be self-perpetuating. It is a consumption it is a consumption oriented credo.

Were not socializing our kids to pass on anything except perhaps our bad habits like sitting and watching TV and taking handouts from the government. This cannot last; it is already in the process of failing. The productive members of society are not perpetuating themselves. They're not having children and the children that they have are not as socially aware, as Putnam points out, or as fundamentally educated whatever their degrees, as the preceding generations. All of the Western societies are drawing down

their capital of generations past, supporting today's elderly at a level beyond what they can afford, and making minimal investments in the rising generation.

The nominal dollar investment has actually been rising quickly. The costs of school and university are astronomical. However that money is not going to the benefit of the students, but to the rent seeking functionaries who manage those institutions. In any case we are not forming a rising generation with the same values or the same abilities as prior generations. These kids, saddled with debt, with worse job prospects and no commitment to family and kids, are simply not reproducing themselves.

This sounds like doom and gloom. It does represent a sea change in Western civilization, but not necessarily a bad one. Where does it lead?

First it leads to an eventual decline in populations. The earth cannot support the 7 billion people that we have now. The people most inclined to consume are the people who are dying out. Well and good.

The societies where sons somewhat resemble fathers are mostly less rich in money but, one would judge higher in social capital. I would point to homogeneous societies in Latin America such as Costa Rica and Chile and to societies in Eastern Europe. They have a minimal concept of welfare, because the government can't afford it. The societies are not diverse because they don't have enough wealth to attract immigrants. Tradition religion, or some combination of belief in their ethnic traditions and religion seems to be holding its own. Some of these societies are reproducing themselves; in others the birth rate is at least rising again.

I think that we will see a sea change as the pendulum swings back from an excessive liberalism to favor the societies that have not been as affected by the progressive project, places where self-reliance and tradition have remained strong.

There are traditional pockets within American society where culture and population are sustaining themselves. They include the Mormons, the Amish, and the Hassidic Jews. They are notable for having retained their social capital, at a community level at least, and a belief that their culture is worth passing on to subsequent generations. When we bury today's progressives, who variously believe that having children is akin to setting vermin loose on a helpless Gaia or simply that kids are too much bother, these will be the ones left. Putnam won't be alive to witness it, but his thesis will be vindicated.

Bowling alone

Quote

social capital refers to connections among individuals— social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them. In that sense social capital is closely related to what some have called “civic virtue.” The difference is that “social capital” calls attention to the fact that civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a dense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital.

Putnam, Robert D. (2001-08-01). *Bowling Alone* (Kindle Locations 144-148). Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

Yogi Berra who offered the most succinct definition of reciprocity: “If you don’t go to somebody’s funeral, they won’t come to yours.”

Putnam, Robert D. (2001-08-01). *Bowling Alone* (Kindle Locations 186-187). Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

Workplace is where we make our connections. Location 10%

When sociologist Alan Wolfe spoke with several hundred middle-class suburbanites around the country in 1995– 96, he encountered a number of people who expressed this thesis. Jeremy Toole of Cobb County, Georgia, estimated that “these days people get about 90 percent of their social connections from the workplace.” Diana Hamilton of Sand Springs, Oklahoma, ruminated that “I think people’s lives revolve around their work. They make their friends at work, they do their community service through work.” And Elizabeth Tyler of Brookline, Massachusetts, added, “I feel very much like I belong to a community of work ... to a community with my own office, with my own company, within my own industry.”¹⁵ In one sense, such a trend might not be surprising. The Industrial Revolution itself began the process of separating place of work

Putnam, Robert D. (2001-08-01). *Bowling Alone* (Kindle Locations 1400-1406). Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

Location 2312

To be sure, weaker informal social control in cities also makes them freer places to live—“ City air liberates,” as the medieval proverb had it. Enfeebled thin trust may be a fair price for that freedom.

Putnam, Robert D. (2001-08-01). *Bowling Alone* (Kindle Locations 2318-2319). Simon & Schuster. Kindle Edition.

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Check on the Tupulo model – it might be applicable in Ukraine.