Bowling Alone: What's the Score?

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Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* is a ten-pin strike, a major contribution to sociology. Whether, at the end of "game," Putnam will have scored highly enough to convince most spectators remains to be decided. Still, this session can help us tote up the score somewhere around the fifth frame. After some introductory comments on *Bowling Alone*, I will focus on two concerns: the coherence of "social capital" as the book's central concept and whether Putnam is correct about a decline in social connections.¹

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There are many virtues to *Bowling Alone*. It is prodigiously bold, addressing key issues within the big question of "Whither America?" While many have speculated about a fraying of American's social fabric, none have tackled so wide a range of social action -- from voting to family meals -- in so systematic and empirical a fashion. It is a bravura exhibition of research technique and energy. Careful scouring of the footnotes -- which I also recommend -- only reinforces the impression that one gets from scanning the book. (I once asked Bob whether the footnotes reading "author's analysis" literally meant that he had personally ground out the statistical results. He said yes. I bow to a master number-cruncher.) *Bowling Alone* is also notable for the accessibility of its prose and its success in bringing important social concerns and quality social research to wide audience.

*Bowling Alone* has less obvious virtues, too. It is historically grounded in ways too often uncommon in the behavioral sciences. A small example pertains to residential mobility. Putnam notes that increasing mobility could not explain a decline in social involvement, because mobility has not been increasing (p. 205) -- a plain fact too many sociologists do not know.² More centrally, Putnam clearly states -- and this is something that a few of his critics miss -- that he is not describing an eons-long decline in social bonds; he is not claiming a "fall from grace." Instead, he is describing a relatively recent reversal in social trends. Americans in the 1950s, he contends, were more socially connected than those who came after and those who came before.³ In such ways, *Bowling Alone* rejects simple tradition-modernity formulas in search of historical accuracy.

Also, Putnam introduces some, by my lights, useful concepts and observations. For example,

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¹ My attention here is directed to the first three sections of *Bowling Alone*, the descriptions of social changes and the explanations of those changes (pp. 1-284; page references are to Putnam 2000).

² For brief examples of this blindness, see Fischer (2000).

³ For example, Etxóni (2001: 224) suggests that Putnam's argument was foretold by Nisbet. Hardly. Nisbet and others in the "mass society" vein wrote of a loss of community exactly when, Putnam argues, community-ness reached its twentieth-century peak.
schmoozer and macher are great additions to our conceptual toolkit (partly because the more Yiddish, the better). Also, his analysis of television's pernicious effects -- data-based rather than hortatory -- is a good corrective to television's apologists. Finally, Putnam's ability to resurrect his thesis from its premature burial by his critics is admirable. To many who followed the debates since the mid-1990s stimulated by Putnam's original articles, it seemed, as one of my colleagues put it, that the forthcoming *Bowling Alone* was "D.O.A." Too many of Putnam's empirical claims had been cast in doubt between 1995 and 2000. But by adding in large, new data-sets and squeezing them dry, Putnam not only salvaged his argument, he gained the high ground. At the moment, *Bowling Alone* is the major statement on "Whither America?"

Enough praise.

One definition of "critic" is "fault-finder" and I find several faults in *Bowling Alone*. *Bowling Alone* has more mixed results than a quick read suggests. A couple he discusses, notably the data showing that volunteering has increased. Some of the contradictions are reported but buried in footnotes. Others are evident but not fully confronted. For example, Putnam acknowledges that attendance rates at public events such as sports have increased. He dismisses this evidence of increased sociability, because he says that doing sports is better than watching sports. But exercise is not the question at hand; public attendance at sports is public participation and overwhelmingly done with family and friends. (Fair disclosure: I hold season tickets to the San Francisco Giants *and* play softball.) A more significant example concerns crime, which researchers including Putnam typically treat as an indicator of low "social capital." Rising crime rates from about 1965 to 1990 reinforce the description of social disintegration. However, since about 1990 -- and in some data, even before -- crime rates have dropped significantly. How does that fit the story line in *Bowling Alone*? Not too well.

Also, Putnam must be faulted for some rhetorical overkill (e.g., pp. 39, 43). For example, he describes a change, say, from 10 percent to eight percent in some activity as a formidable "twenty

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4 One response (Norris 1996) is not persuasive because it simply shows that news-watchers are civic.

5 Putnam's articles had rested on the General Social Survey. *Bowling Alone* uses the GSS, but not nearly as much as it relies on other longitudinal, national surveys.

6 E.g., p. 110 versus p. 460n.48; p. 142 versus p.468n.29; p. 190 versus p.474n.2,3.

7 The 1990s drop in FBI crime statistics is well-known. Victimization surveys suggest a longer trend on declining crime rates, since the early 1980s. See, e.g., the *Statistical Abstract 1999* and *1995*. Putnam (p. 144) notes but downplays the drop in crime.
percent" decline, when it really is a two-point and perhaps marginally significant change. Elsewhere, he downplays similar variations in the opposite direction.⁸

These are complications about evidence. There are conceptual issues as well. Notably, Putnam has further popularized that dreadful metaphor, "social capital." Aside from the substantive issues around the notion -- which I discuss below -- the phrase itself is a problem. It is a metaphor that misleads: Where can I borrow some "social capital?" what is the going interest rate?; can I move some of my social capital off-shore?⁹ It is an unnecessary phrase when clearer and simpler terms -- like membership, family, sociability, and trust -- serve perfectly well.¹⁰ Also, the "social capital" metaphor tends to expand in all directions like a swamp in wet weather.¹¹ Yes, "social capital" has become a quite popular term, one of the many species of "capitals" that have infested sociologists' prose (see discussion in, e.g., Portes 1998; Woolcock 1998). Using it does allow a sociologist to play in the same sandbox as economists; they have their kinds of capital and we have ours. And using the phrase probably allows the sociologist more access to the ears and wallets of the powers that be than simply writing about, say, friendship and church attendance. On the other hand, the term has reciprocally allowed economists to colonize those topics. Now many of them are writing about neighborhood get-togethers, PTAs, Bible study classes, and the like (e.g., Glaeser et al 2000; Costa and Kahn 2001; Alesina and La Ferrara 2000). This is not necessarily a good thing.

In the end, however, these faults are minor when compared to the achievement that is *Bowling

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⁸ E.g., on p. 129, a 30% increase in volunteering among 20-to-29-year-olds is labeled as "modest," when elsewhere such changes are described as major.

⁹ Putnam (p. 19) says that "social capital refers to connections among individuals -- social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them." The reason he needs to re-label these perfectly usable terms into a "capital" is "that social networks have value . . . [they] can affect the productivity of individuals and groups." First, the assumption that the trust norms are a package with networks remains to be established (see below). Second, many things affect productivity -- from good looks to good luck. Shall all these be labeled a "capital?" If yes, to what use? Third, some networks and social norms detract from productivity, like bad friends and obligations to elderly parents or grasping relatives. Is that "social debt"? The O.E.D.'s closest definition of capital to Putnam's use is "wealth in any form used to help in producing more wealth." Are social ties and warm feelings used to produce financial wealth? Or more social ties and warm feelings? Or something else? The metaphor casts more confusion than light.

¹⁰ Putnam implicitly recognizes the problem when he switches to other metaphors to describe types of "social capital:" "bridging" and "binding," both terms much more suited to a metaphor around "ties" than around capital. (Why not "investment capital," "venture capital," "rolling stock," etc.?)

¹¹ So, for example, Glaeser et al (2000) write that "individual social capital [is] a person's social characteristics -- including social skills, charisma, and the size of his Rolodex -- which enables him to reap market and non-market returns from interactions with others" [p.3], which is not much different from saying that social capital is everything psychologically and sociologically about a person.
Alone. This review is devoted mainly to two big questions: (1) Is there a thing such as the so-called "social capital"? (2) Is Bowling Alone true? Has this thing declined and, if so, has it declined for the reasons Putnam gives? Obviously, to fully answer these questions would require re-doing Bowling Alone itself. I merely raise some considerations.

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Bowling Alone analyzes a vast range of individual behavior, including voting, belonging to sororities, church outings, playing bridge, having family dinners, do-good volunteering, and professing one's faith in one's fellow humans to a pollster, not to mention league bowling. All of these are elements of so-called "social capital." Are these really all of a kind? And, if not, what different things have been squeezed under this single rubric?

If these behaviors all reflected some underlying property of individuals -- personal tendencies toward social connectedness and commitment -- then we would expect people who generally do one behavior to also generally do another. Do they? Not really. Researchers have, for example, identified voting as a distinct practice from other sorts of political participation or "social capital." Case in point: The Pew Center's recent study of trust found that trusting and distrusting survey respondents voted at about the same rate (Pew Center 2000: Table 3).12 Similarly, Putnam and his critics agree that volunteering seems to show a different pattern than other forms of social participation; the former was increasing in the last couple of decades (Ch. 7; Greeley 1997; Wuthnow 1997; Ladd 1999; Costa and Kahn 2001 report no real trend).

I briefly tested the assumption of "social capital" coherence in a quarter-decade of GSS surveys (1972-2000). I took seven presumed indicators -- trusting most people, voting, church attendance, belonging to organizations, socializing with neighbors, socializing with friends outside the neighborhood, and giving money to charity -- and asked whether respondents who reported doing one tended to also report doing another. The answer is: not really. The strongest association is between reported church attendance and reported membership in organizations ($r = .27$) and some items are unrelated (such as voting and getting together with neighbors, $r = -.01$).13 If one used such items to create a "social capital" scale for individuals, it would be a very poor one by typical standards. (This exercise is reported in

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12 Examples of other sorts of studies that separate voting from other dimensions of "social capital," including civic participation, are Inglehart (1997); Altschuler and Blumin (2000); and Kaufman (1999).

13 And as to "norms of ... trustworthiness that arise from [social networks]" (p. 19), the correlations of trust with seeing neighbors and friends were about zero (Appendix A).
Appendix A.)

Maybe these attributes are components of the same thing in a different sense: Instead of being parallel manifestations of personal "social capital," they are "assets" in people's "social capital portfolios," different kinds of "capital stock." Some people "invest" in churches, some in political campaigning, some in family dinners, and yet others in being trusting souls. If people invest differently -- I do friends, you do volunteering, she does churches -- then we would not expect high correlations among these activities. But in real financial portfolios, people who have more of one asset tend to also have more of another. Anyway, this is not how Putnam describes or uses "social capital" (although it would fit the metaphor better; see Glaeser et al 2000).

Although we can stipulate for the moment that the great majority of Putnam's indicators have moved in the same direction over the last quarter-century, the wholism implicit in the "social capital" concept is not persuasive. We could start to suspect that a few different things, perhaps mutually influencing one another, are involved.

One thing, for example, is political. Expressions of political distrust have increased substantially, as have other -- although not all -- signs of political alienation, such as disinterest in the news and declining turnout. The sources of this change may well lie in the body politic itself.

Another realm is personal sociability, being connected to kin and friends. The trends here -- unlike those regarding politics -- are weak and mixed (e.g., less entertaining at home, yet more personal phone calls), but perhaps real. Their source may well lie in the time pressures of the last few decades and women's increasing hours away from the home.

Yet another realm is organizational participation. Here, Wuthnow (1998) makes a persuasive case that civic activity has shifted in form. Instead of participating through the sorts of bureaucracies exemplified by the Rotary, people increasingly participate in ad hoc, specialized ways, illustrated by an AIDS walk, beach cleanup, or lobbying campaign. They can be altruistic individualistically (Wuthnow 1991; a new but nifty illustration of Wuthnow's description is the award-winning web site,
www.volunteermatch.org, which allows people to join particular do-gooder activities on a one-time basis and even do "remote volunteering.") On the other hand, this kind of volunteering could be just the sort of *Bowling Alone* activity Putnam is pointing to, here doing good outside of a "league."17

More generally, Putnam's odd-lot of behaviors could be organized under at least two more specific -- and more sociological -- conceptual canopies.

One is the familiar construct of individualism. It is surprising that Putnam does not fully confront the fact that much of his subject matter is what most people call "individualism." He mentions the term rarely (e.g., p. 82) and does not include it in the book's index (!). Perhaps, individualism is a concept much too hoary and barnacled with old debates; perhaps it would make *Bowling Alone* sound too much like earlier jeremiads. But, is that not really much of what the book is about, Durkheim's egoisme -- Americans giving (proportionally) less money to charity, or being less sociable, or more materialistic? Several topics in *Bowling Alone* would better labeled individualism rather than "social capital"-- defining individualism as practices that favor individual interests over group interests. Addressing individualism would place *Bowling Alone* into a familiar literature, but with a radically different twist. The twist is that Putnam's findings imply that individualism actually decreased through most of the twentieth century and increased only after the 1950s when Americans began indulging, to use Alan Ehrenhalt's (2000:251) phrase, "the worship of choice."

Or, much of what Putnam discusses as "eroded social capital" might be better described as increasing privatism. Even if we stipulate, for the discussion, that Americans have withdrawn from public activities such as politics and civic clubs, the question arises as to whether they have withdrawn all the way into their isolated, lonely selves (ultimate individualism), or have withdrawn into a more private world of family, work, and friends -- a story of greater, but still social, privatism. The second analysis is consistent with Banfield's (1958) formulation on civic-mindedness: Civic life in Italian villages suffered, he claimed, not because Italians were individualistic, but because they were amorally familistic, putting the private group above the public good.18 *Bowling Alone* leans toward the first, the social atomistic, argument. It contrasts the picture of a grandfather who, after serving his nation in World War II, belonged to the Elks, was a church deacon, and bowled in a league to the picture of his grandson who does little more than commute, work, and watch television – all alone. But much in

17 Point suggested by Mike Hout.

18 Banfield and his student, James Q. Wilson, went on to study "public- versus private-regardingness" (e.g., Wilson and Banfield 1984).
Bowling Alone nevertheless fits the formulation of a shift from public to private sociality.¹⁹

When Putnam does concede that some kinds of social activity — fundamentalist religious denominations, self-help and "new age" groups, volunteering — have increased, his trump card is to critique those forms for being inward-looking rather than civic-minded. Fundamentalist churches, for example, tend to focus on saving members' souls rather than on civic philanthropy; it is "privatized religion" (Ch. 4). Fair enough, but parochial sociality is quite different than no sociality at all; it is still sociality. Similarly, Putnam's distinction between "bridging" and "bonding" types of social capital (better phrased as bridging versus in-bound social networks) reinforces a contrast between public and private rather than a contrast between social and asocial.

Empirically, Putnam presents several findings that suggest a decline in all forms of sociality, private as well as public -- lowered church attendance, fewer family meals, less frequent social entertaining, for example. But on the whole this evidence is more mixed (recall greater attendance at sporting events) than that concerning civic withdrawal and subject to quite different explanations (the effects of time constraints, for example²⁰).

This public-private formulation -- or an individualism formulation -- better captures the common issues in the potpourri of behaviors labeled in Bowling Alone as "social capital." Moreover, the historical trends concerning these separate domains -- politics, organizations, individualism, and privatism -- may be only apparently coincident. This brings me to the second big topic.

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Is Bowling Alone true? Have many forms of sociality declined since about 1970? If so, have they declined because of the reasons Putnam presents? Many scholars responded to Putnam's first articles with a verdict of "case not proven." Now, given the wealth of data in Bowling Alone, the burden of proof is on the critics. Yet, there are points of contention that can be raised.

Putnam's initial and central claim was that membership in civic organizations had declined. This is now perhaps one of his weaker assertions. Rates of membership, in a gross sense, seem not to have

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¹⁹ For some relevant discussions on privatism, see, e.g., Seligman (1998); Weintraub (1997); McClay (1995); and Laslett (1973).

²⁰ Take the case of voting: Census surveys asked Americans who were registered but failed to vote why they had not voted. Between 1980 and 1996 the biggest change in responses was a leap from 8 to 22 percent who said "busy/no time." Answers indicative of political disenchantment ("not interested" plus "didn't like the candidates") did not increase, 28 and 29 percent (United States Bureau of the Census 1998).
declined or to have declined in only a few specific types of organizations. Putnam essentially shifted his argument (and his data) to focus on active participation in organizations, and Bowling Alone presents much evidence of a decline in activities such as attending political rallies. But: volunteering time and labor, as noted earlier, is up, or at least steady. With respect to politics, researchers have pointed out that some sorts of political activity, such as writing congressmen and mobilizing neighbors, may have become more common since the 1960s (e.g., Verba et al 1995: p. 72; Inglehart 1997; Ladd 1999). And in some cases, readers might be skeptical that the size of changes warrants so much to-do (e.g., Greeley n.d.). For example, church membership rates, according to Gallup Polls, declined from a high of about 75% around 1950 to a roughly stable level of around 68% since the mid-1970s (Gallup Poll 2001). This 7-point drop (9 percent in Putnam's calculus) over 50 years is well within the sort of error posed by variations in polling procedures, response rates, and the like -- and is largely confined to Catholics). Finally, a looming issue is the trustworthiness of one of Putnam's key data-sets, the multi-year DDB Needham marketing poll.

Another contention of critics is that Putnam has failed to consider other sorts, perhaps better sorts, of measures of "social capital," especially informal associations and new organizational inventions such as support groups that may have increased in recent decades (e.g., Wuthnow 1991, 1998; although Putnam has a thorough response in Bowling Alone). Some critics suggest that the very nature of civic and political participation has changed. It has become more diffuse, in ways that are real and effective, but poorly measured in the standard surveys (e.g., Schudson 1998). Personal relations, too, may have evolved -- not eroded -- in ways not captured by the standard measures (e.g., Starr, 2000). For example,

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21 Part of the Putnam's original results turned out to be statistical error. Also, critics noted that the GSS survey counted, not memberships, but types of organizations to which people belonged (e.g., three veteran's groups would count only as one type). Also, a decline in the average number of membership types appeared only once education was held constant -- a controversial procedure (see, e.g., Nie et al 1996; Helliwell and Putnam 1999). Critics pointed out that new sorts of groups were not captured by the standard list (e.g., Cohen 1999; Ammerman 1997; Baumgartner and Walker 1988 vs. Smith 1990 and following comment). And other analysts have found that the decline in membership was restricted to only a few types of organizations, notably unions, veterans, and church groups (author's analysis; see, also, Costa and Kahn 2001; Wuthnow 1997; Ladd 1999; Paxton 1999).

22 Verba et al (1995: 72), for example, also report an increase between 1967 and 1987 of from 14 to 17 percent in the percentage of Americans who had "form[ed] a group to help solve local problems" -- an increase, in Putnam's metric, of 21 percent! (Oddly, Putnam cites other findings from this study, but not these.)

23 Putnam does a good job of defending the data, but the survey does violate key assumptions in scientific polling, resting on a volunteer sample with a response rate of five percent. Much of Putnam's strongest claims depend on that data. We have yet to see the academic verdict rendered on it.
especially with women working more, social ties at work may have become relatively more important.\textsuperscript{24} This line of argument contends that social connectedness has \textit{changed} rather than \textit{declined}. We still await empirical support for this argument.

If we grant the \textit{descriptive claims} in \textit{Bowling Alone}, that Americans are participating less in many forms of social and civic activity, the next questions arise about the \textit{explanations} Putnam proffers. He places greatest weight on generational succession (because most of the survey data show big differences among generations but smaller differences over time for any particular generation\textsuperscript{25}) and some part of those differences, he argues, are, in turn, the product of being raised with television. Putnam attributes lesser causal effect to increased work and commuting hours.

Yet, \textit{Bowling Alone} probably underestimates the importance of work pressures and of women's increasing participation in the paid labor force (see, e.g., Costa and Kahn 2001). After all, much of what the book discusses are precisely time-consuming activities. As individual and family time demands -- such as commuting, which Putnam does focus on, but also work hours and child care -- accumulate something has to give (although, neither attention to children nor religion seem to be one of those).\textsuperscript{26} The increasing preoccupation of women with work surely accounts for much of the strains on voluntary associations.\textsuperscript{27}

While Putnam covers a wide range of explanations, there are others that are un- or perhaps insufficiently explored. A couple of studies, for example, suggest that widening inequalities in American society undermine organizational membership (Alesina and La Ferra 2000; Costa and Kahn 2001).

\textsuperscript{24} Putnam notes the point about work but reports that there is no evidence that work ties have increased or decreased in recent decades (pp. 85ff).

\textsuperscript{25} For example, trusting (p. 141).

\textsuperscript{26} On increased work hours, see Jacobs and Gerson (1998). (Although the issue is contested, most authorities believe that total work time -- at least among Americans in the prime working years -- has increased.) On some of the consequences, see Family and Work Institute (1999); Bianchi et al (2000). Bianchi (2000) reports that parent-child contact, however, \textit{did not} decline in the last couple of decades. Fischer et al (2000) find limited effects of family time pressures on church membership or attendance.

\textsuperscript{27} Putnam argues that women's participation in the labor force cannot be a major explanation for declining civic participation, because the decline is at least as strong among non-working women. But that argument neglects contextual effects, something Putnam appreciates in the abstract, but not in this concrete case. As energetic and socially-skilled wives get careers, it becomes harder for those women remaining at home to sustain civic activities. (A principle of most voluntary organizations is that 10 percent of the people do at least 90 percent of the work.) Indeed, employed women might show \textit{less} decline in their participation because they take their energies into professional activities and because their professional work can assist their civic work (e.g. lawyers providing an environmental group with \textit{pro bono} advice). Those out of the labor force are left to shoulder much of the voluntary association burdens alone -- especially in traditional organizations, such as women's clubs -- and many cannot sustain the effort. (Wuthnow [1998] describes a couple of cases such as this.)
The television argument gains special persuasiveness because a variety of evidence, not just survey-data correlations, but also observational studies, experiments, and individual-level and community-level longitudinal studies all point to the antisocial effects of television-watching (e.g., Williams 1986; Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi 1990; Wartella and Mazzarella 1990). Americans' recent distrust of politics may simply reflect what they have recently learned about politics. Similarly, Americans may have become more anxious and distrustful since the 1950s because their social milieux have become more frightful. For example, Americans' answers to the questions about distrusting "people" track very closely with the national homicide rate and personal experiences of crime (Pew Center 2000: Figure 6; Smith 1997; see also Mansbridge 1997; Lipset 1995). These alternative explanations -- ones that point to time constraints, to political events, to particular social changes -- differ from Putnam's, first, by being topic-specific and, second, by linking concrete events to changes in individual behavior, instead of positing a global change in a diffuse quality such as civic-mindedness or sociability.

The diffuseness of Putnam's favored explanation -- generational change -- is another problem. To say that generational turnover -- or historical time -- "explains" something is not really to explain, but to label. What about different generations would lead those who are now senior citizens to be highly civic-minded and their children to be much less so? Television provides a partial answer: Perhaps because baby-boomers were the first to grow up watching television, that habit permanently sapped their social energies. But, beyond television, the generational explanation is vague and weakly supported. Putnam devotes considerable space to arguing that World War II instilled an *esprit de corps* in the "Greatest Generation," but the evidence for that is largely impressionistic (pp. 267ff). One could tell a similar story of how the shared experience of overcrowded schools, political traumas in the 1960s, and the efflorescence of youth culture bonded a generation that danced together in the streets to the beat of Motown. Yet that describes the Weakest Generation. In truth, the source of the generational differences -- the special civic mindedness of Americans born between 1910 and 1940 -- remains mysterious.

Perhaps what we have in the generational differences is some sort of long-term cyclical pattern. Some ideas and customs -- just like some organizations -- wax and wane. (In the 1920s, the Rotary is an

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29 Another quirk in the explanation is that *Bowling Alone* attributes the high participation level of Americans born between 1910 and 1940 largely to their *adult* experiences, the war, but the low participation level of the Baby Boomers largely to their *childhood* experiences, watching television.
exciting break with the stodgy old men's fraternities like the Moose; in the 1970s, spiritual exploration is an exciting break with the stodgy old men's clubs like the Rotary.) Maybe, cultural patterns expand until they break of their own weight, giving way to something new. If so, perhaps the social unraveling Putnam describes has run its course. Here and there in Bowling Alone, Putnam notes hopeful new signs, such as increasing volunteering. Other signs are there, too. For example, crime is down almost to levels of the 1960s; trust in government rebounded in the 1990s (Moore 2000; Nie et al 1997; Pew Center 2000); early teen sexual experimentation declined (Lindberg et al 2000); and new forms of social connections, some aided by technology, emerged. Maybe the wheel is about to turn again. Perhaps even stylized responses to surveys will shift from the ironic and cynical back toward the more pollyannaish self-presentations of the 1950s. Robert Putnam may have founded a movement for more civic-mindedness just as Americans were moving that way on their own accord.

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These criticisms should, in the end, not detract from the great accomplishment that Bowling Alone is. Putnam has racked up a high score and many social scientists will be busy in the next several years following this "game." He has mightily contributed an impressive catalog of well-documented social changes and a set of provocative ideas about those changes. Whether Putnam has accurately interpreted the changes or explained them is more debatable.

My major debates with Bowling Alone involve:

* objecting to "social capital," both as terminology and as concept;
* suggesting that we would get more theoretical traction by thinking about individualism and privatism than about "social capital;"
* observing that disaggregating the topics now lumped together under "social capital" would also yield a better empirical understanding of what has been going on. The contradictions in data and trends might be better resolved by seeing the social changes as roughly coincident but different phenomena;
* noting limits in the persuasiveness of the generational explanation and the promising possibilities of turning to other explanations;
* and expecting that new research -- so much stimulated by Robert Putnam -- will revise the claims in Bowling Alone.

For now, however, Bowling Alone is the prime reference on "Whither America?"
Appendix A. Exploring the Intercorrelations Among "Social Capital" Items.

The following reports a modest exercise in assessing whether elements of Putnam's "social capital" cohere in a fashion one would expect if they all indicated a global property of individuals. The data are the 1972 through 2000 General Social Surveys.

I took seven measures:

1. Trust -- whether the respondent reported trusting "most" people (three-point scale).
2. Voted -- whether the respondent reported voting in the previous presidential election (no/yes).
3. Attendance -- reported frequency of attendance at church services (7-point scale).
4. Organizations -- the number of organization types the respondent reported belonging to (0 through 4 or more -- the famous NUMMEM scale).
5. Neighbors -- how often the respondent got together with neighbors (7-point scale).
6. Friends -- how often the respondent got together with friends outside the neighborhood (7-point scale).
7. Giving -- how many types of organizations, out of thirteen (including informal giving and "other" giving), the respondent reported giving money to in 1995 (0 through 4 or more; available only for the 1996 GSS).

The zero-order correlations among them are:

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</table>

The partial correlations among them controlling for age, education, marital status, and race are:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Trust</th>
<th>Voted</th>
<th>Attendance</th>
<th>Org'z'ns</th>
<th>Neighbors</th>
<th>Friends</th>
<th>Giving</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trust</td>
<td>.10</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>.04</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Voted</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.03</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attendance</td>
<td></td>
<td>.27</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>.17</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Org'z'ns</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.12</td>
<td>.13</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neighbors</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.18</td>
<td>.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The controls do little to improve the picture of quite modest associations for items meant to all indicate one thing.

This is, of course, only a quick look, not an in-depth analysis. But if the "social capital" concept presumes a tight interconnection among its various elements, that does not immediately appear in the data.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


