

Diversity, Social Capital, and Cohesion

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Abstract

We review the burgeoning literature on ethno-racial diversity and its alleged effects on public trust and cohesion in the context of the evolution of the concept of social capital and earlier claims about its manifold positive effects. We present evidence that questions such claims and points to the roots of civicism and trust in deep historical processes associated with race and immigration. We examine the claims that immigration reduces social cohesion by drawing on the sociological classics to show the forms of cohesion that actually keep modern societies together. This leads to a typology that shows “communitarianism” to be just one such form and one not required, and not necessarily ideal, for the smooth operation of complex organizations and institutions. Implications of our conclusions for future research and immigration policy are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The concept of social capital is arguably the most successful export from sociology into the public domain in recent years. Ironically, that feat was not accomplished by the major theorists who developed the concept—the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu and the American sociologist James S. Coleman—but by political scientist Robert Putnam who redefined and popularized the term.

As numerous reviews have noted, the social capital about which Bourdieu wrote has little to do with what the concept later became. For the French author, social capital is a resource of individuals and families inherent in their network of relationships and capable of being transformed into other forms of capital—economic and cultural. It is, in essence, the ability of persons and families to command resources through their membership in networks and other social structures (Bourdieu 1979, 1980; Wacquant 2000). For Putnam, in contrast, social capital is a public good—the amount of participatory potential, civic orientation, and trust in others available to cities, states, or nations (Putnam 1993, 2000). Coleman’s definition fell somewhere in the middle, related to the density of social ties and their capacity to enforce the observance of the norms. “Closure” was the term that he used to refer to mutual knowledge and social ties between community members who support each other and sanction deviance. Coleman lamented the disappearance of community closure, which gave way, in the modern world, to ever-growing atomization and anomie (Coleman 1988, 1993).

Despite their conceptual differences, Bourdieu’s and Coleman’s use of the term led to similar operational definitions. In both cases, they were based on the network of relationships in which individuals and families were embedded and on the density and other characteristics of such networks. When Putnam telescoped the concept into much larger social units, the empirical focus changed from the immediate circle of relationships surrounding individuals and families to aggregate characteristics of the

population. These included such indicators as the average number of civic associations per thousand population, the percentage of people who participate in a local organization, and the percentage of people who endorse the survey item “most people can be trusted.” On the basis of these and related items, Putnam and his collaborators were able to construct a composite index that allowed them to compare the “stock” of social capital available to all 50 U.S. states (Putnam 2000).

In the end, this was the version of the concept that prevailed in the public mind and that has been adopted, in some form or another, by major institutions such as the World Bank (Grootaert & Bastelaer 2002). This feat was due, in large part, to the rhetorical skill with which Putnam contrasted the civicness and solidarity of earlier generations with the atomization of today’s “uncivic” generation that has led so many Americans to “bowl alone.” That image was accompanied by a fervent argument in favor of rebuilding social capital as a key source of many public goods, from the strengthening of democracy and the reduction of economic inequality to public health and personal happiness (Etzioni 2001).

In 2006 at Uppsala University in Sweden, Putnam presented initial findings from an ongoing research program investigating the relationship between ethnic diversity and social cohesion (Putnam 2007). Despite professing enthusiasm for the positive social and economic effects of immigration and diversity, he reported that diversity in the United States is strongly related to the tendency to withdraw from collective life. Although some of these findings had previously been presented, this address was the first comprehensive summary of the project’s initial results and thus reinvigorated research into the relationship between heterogeneity and social cohesion. Much subsequent research has responded to Putnam’s call to test the proposed relationship in contexts other than the United States, but the resulting findings have been far from unanimous in confirming his arguments. Instead of the strong, negative relationship

between diversity and social cohesion evident in Putnam's address, many studies find a relationship that is weak and contingent on various individual and contextual factors.

We begin this review with a discussion of the concept of social capital as it evolved into civicism and its empirical underpinnings. We then examine the burgeoning literature that has evolved on the relationship between ethnoracial diversity, civicism, and social cohesion. We then return to a theoretical discussion of the implications of these findings and seek to place contemporary immigration in this framework. Overall, our review is guided by the following questions: First, is social capital—defined as communitarianism and generalized trust—the powerful causal force that Putnam and his followers allege it to be? Second, is this form of social capital the main basis for cohesion in modern society? Third, what are the real effects of modern immigration on both diversity and social cohesion?

SOCIAL CAPITAL AS CIVICNESS AND TRUST¹

During the 1980s and 1990s, Putnam's work recast social capital as a feature of communities and of entire societies. A strong group of critics emerged, however, to question both the redefinition of the concept and its alleged consequences. They argued that sociability and participation were not necessarily the bonanzas predicted by Putnam and his followers and that they could have significant downsides. In her analysis of the collapse of the Weimar Republic, political scientist Sheri Berman (1997, pp. 424–25) concluded, for example, that

The German case reveals a distinct pattern of associationism that does not conform to the predictions of neo-Tocquevillian theories. German civil society was rich and

extensive . . . and this nation of joiners should accordingly have provided fertile soil for a successful democratic experiment. Instead it succumbed to totalitarianism The vigor of civil society continued to draw public interest and involvement away from parties and politics. Eventually, the Nazis seized the opportunities afforded by such a situation.

In a critical review of social capital as a characteristic of cities and nations, Portes (1998) noted that, for Putnam's argument to be taken seriously, three methodological conditions had to be observed:

- First, social capital must be defined, conceptually and empirically, as distinct from its alleged consequences.
- Second, measures of social capital must be taken prior to its hypothesized effects to ensure that the causal relationship does not run in the opposite direction.
- Third, there must be a control for other variables that could plausibly explain the observed relationship in order to guard against spuriousness.

Putnam's response to his critics was to assemble a vast amount of empirical data and to analyze them along lines that conformed broadly to these criteria. Results were published in *Bowling Alone* (Putnam 2000). Having constructed a 14-item index of social capital as an aggregate characteristic of the 50 states, Putnam proceeded to relate it to a host of important collective outcomes, including "education and children's welfare," "safe and productive neighborhoods," "economic prosperity," "health and happiness," and "democracy." The results, presented in successive chapters of the book, show how the Social Capital Index (SCI) relates positively to each of these results and how these relationships endure even after controlling for a host of factors.

For example, the SCI was strongly correlated with test scores at the elementary, junior, and high school levels. This correlation was graphically portrayed in a figure showing

¹This section is drawn from a previously unpublished paper (Portes et al. 2003).

that states low in social capital have low average scores and those high in social capital report the best results. The analysis then controls for several factors that could account for this relationship—racial composition, economic affluence, inequality, poverty rates, religious affiliation, and others. Putnam reported, “Not surprisingly, several of these factors had an independent effect on state test scores and dropout rates, but astonishingly, social capital was the single most important explanatory factor” (Putnam 2000, pp. 301–2).

In another chapter of *Bowling Alone*, Putnam took on the critics who stressed the “dark side of social capital.” He did this by splitting the concept into “civic” social capital—which promotes tolerance of diversity and equality—and “sectarian” social capital—which leads to intolerance. So far the critics were about half right, but then Putnam turned to his index of social capital to show that the higher the stock of social capital in a state, the higher the level of tolerance toward minorities and dissenters. He reported that this relationship held even after controlling for average education, income, urbanism, and other factors and concluded that, “Except for the very common finding that religious involvement, especially in fundamentalist churches, is linked to intolerance, I have not found a single empirical study that confirms the supposed link between community involvement and intolerance” (Putnam 2000, p. 355).

There is something surprisingly consistent in the set of findings presented in Putnam’s book. For researchers accustomed to the imperfections of the real world, the rolling of charts portraying the invariably positive relationships of social capital to a host of important collective outcomes is nothing short of astonishing. To his credit, Putnam placed the entire data set on which his results are based in the public domain, thereby allowing others to reanalyze it. Several authors have done this, coming up with mixed results. As prelude to the review of the more recent literature, we present results from our own analysis bearing on the methodological issues noted above: first, the question of

causal order; second, the possibility of spurious relationships; and third, the sources of communitarianism and public trust.

The Endogeneity Question

The issue of causal order is not well addressed in *Bowling Alone* (hereafter *BA* or *Bowling*). Putnam’s SCI consists of 14 items measuring contemporary traits of associational life or public opinion. A factor analysis of these items shows that they indeed have a high level of internal consistency, as shown by a first factor that explains almost 70% of common variance and whose eigenvalue (the amount of total variance accounted for) quadruples that of the next higher factor. The index also possesses high face validity based on the content of its components. The question then becomes whether social capital, as captured in the SCI, has the multiple positive causal effects that *BA* alleges. To address this question, we may consider five key dependent variables that are claimed to be consequences of social capital: child welfare, single parenthood, economic inequality, poverty, and general population health.

Child welfare is measured by the Kids Count Index, whose item components make it reasonable to believe that they are associated with the civic involvement and trusting attitudes comprising the SCI. However, because the index was measured contemporaneously with the dependent variable, it is not at all clear which comes first. It is equally likely that associational life and trust lead to lower juvenile delinquency and arrest levels than that the absence of widespread juvenile crime and other forms of deviance promote greater expressions of public trust and social participation. Empirically, this is shown in the first row of **Table 1** that presents the reciprocal effects of social capital and child welfare, as well as their net effects controlling for other variables. The SCI retains a strong positive net effect on the Kids Count Index with other variables controlled, but the opposite is also the case. Without including a time-sensitive measure,

Table 1 The relationship between social capital and selected outcomes

Outcomes	Social capital as cause		Social capital as consequence	
	Gross effect ^a	Net effect ^b	Gross effect ^a	Net effect ^b
Child welfare ^c	14.528*** (8.2)	7.316** (3.3)	0.041*** (8.2)	0.041** (5.2)
Single parenthood ^d	-3.351** (3.1)	-0.927 n.s. (1.4)	-0.051** (3.1)	0.001 n.s. (0.0)
Poverty rate, 1981	-2.610** (3.6)	-0.182 n.s. (0.3)	-0.083** (3.6)	-0.020 n.s. (1.9)
Economic inequality, 1989 ^e	-0.021*** (6.4)	-0.011** (2.8)	-22.624*** (6.4)	-13.418** (3.5)
General population health ^f	4.812*** (8.01)	3.291*** (4.1)	0.121*** (8.01)	0.091*** (4.8)
N = 50				

^aUnstandardized regression coefficients. T-ratios in parentheses.

^bControlling for percent college graduates; percent black population; poverty rate, 1969 (except when poverty is the dependent variable); economic inequality, 1969 (except when inequality is the dependent variable); single parenthood (except when this is the dependent variable); and region (South).

^cScores in the Kids Count Index. See text.

^dPercent of families with children headed by a single parent ca. 1990.

^eGini Index of Inequality, 1989.

^fScores in the Healthy States Index.

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

***p < .001.

n.s. = not significant.

Source: Authors' reanalysis of *BA* data. Portes et al. (2003).

Putnam's analysis does not allow us to disentangle these effects and truly determine whether or not social capital is causing the positive effects observed.²

A similar story emerges from the regressions of poverty and economic inequality on social capital. In these instances, the argument for reverse causality is even stronger because these are major structural factors that do not change easily over time. It is thus quite plausible that the levels of poverty and economic inequality in a state influence the extent and quality of its associational life and the attitudes of its citizens, rather than vice versa. As is shown in **Table 1**, the reciprocal effects of poverty and inequality on social capital are sizable, making this reasoning at least as credible as the causal order proposed by Putnam. When controls are

introduced for other variables, the effects of social capital on poverty and vice versa cease to be significant, suggesting that the original association was spurious. Effects of the SCI on the Gini Index of Inequality remain significant, but the reverse relationship also remains robust, keeping the original causal ambiguity unresolved. No attempt was made to lag social capital or to instrument it in order to, at least partially, overcome this ambiguity.

The remaining figures in **Table 1** demonstrate the same problem and need not be described at length. The key methodological issue is that all the statistical results presented in *Bowling* purporting to demonstrate effects of social capital are based on unlagged correlations where the causal order of variables cannot be established with any degree of certainty. Child welfare, low juvenile delinquency, and low single parenthood may be part of a single complex—along with safe streets and a strong associational life—representing a better quality of life and determined jointly by the same set of historical factors. This possibility leads logically to the issue of spuriousness.

²Another method, common in economics and sociology, is to instrument the alleged causal factors with a variable that affects them but that is unrelated to the final outcome. This path was not attempted in any of the chapters in *BA* that allege a causal effect of social capital. See Firebaugh (2008) and, for an illustration, Acemoglu et al. (2001).

The Spuriousness Question

The problem of spuriousness refers to the extent to which an alleged causal relationship between two or more variables is due to common antecedent factors. When the partial correlation or regression coefficient between two variables goes down to zero after a third or fourth are controlled, this does not necessarily mean that the original relationship is spurious because this result can also be obtained when the controlled variables intervene or mediate a valid causal relationship. In the case of social capital, the prospect of a spurious rather than a mediated relationship is stronger because the argument is couched in terms of a direct positive effect of high levels of social capital on each outcome.

Academic performance provides a good example. The theory is that in states that are blessed with a strong associational life and a civic citizenry, students do much better in school. This is shown by a bivariate graph in *Bowling* that demonstrates a strong positive linear relationship between the two variables

(Putnam 2000, p. 300). However, as the first column of **Table 2** indicates, as soon as controls are introduced for a few other relevant variables, in particular economic inequality, the original relationship between the SCI and test scores drops to insignificance. For this analysis, economic inequality—measured by the Gini Index—was lagged 20 years relative to both social capital and SAT scores, making the causal direction of these relationships unambiguous.

The case of poverty is still more straightforward. *BA* includes a chapter on “Economic Prosperity” that argues that social capital makes an effective contribution to wealth and growth. However, this chapter omits any of the bivariate graphs that grace others in the book documenting the various benefits of associational life. That omission is for a reason. As shown in **Table 2**, when controls are introduced for other relevant variables, the original relationship between social capital and poverty drops down to insignificance. Particularly important is the strong effect of lagged economic inequality. It is not difficult to understand how a

Table 2 Social capital effects, real and spurious

Predictors	Effects ^a			
	Academic test scores ^b	Poverty rate, 1989	Single parenthood rate ^c	Economic inequality, 1989 ^d
Social capital index	0.138 n.s. (0.7)	-0.177 n.s. (1.4)	-0.091 n.s. (0.9)	-0.495*** (4.7)
Percent college graduates, 1970	-0.129 n.s. (1.0)	-0.025 n.s. (0.3)	0.124 n.s. (1.6)	0.080 n.s. (1.0)
Economic inequality, 1969	-0.795*** (3.9)	0.784*** (5.1)	0.331** (2.9)	0.562*** (4.4)
Poverty rate, 1969	-0.061 n.s. (0.5)	0.052 n.s. (0.6)	0.045 n.s. (0.6)	0.025 n.s. (0.3)
Single parenthood rate	-0.422* (2.3)	0.042 n.s. (0.2)	—	0.278 n.s. (1.8)
Percent black population	0.034 n.s. (0.2)	-0.072 n.s. (0.4)	0.744*** (7.1)	-0.124 n.s. (0.8)
South	-0.246 n.s. (1.1)	-0.071 n.s. (0.5)	-0.399** (3.6)	-0.160 n.s. (1.2)
Adjusted R ²	0.298	0.622	0.755	0.743
N = 49				

^aStandardized regression coefficients (beta weights). T-ratios in parentheses.

^bAdjusted SAT scores ca. 1990.

^cPercent of families with children headed by a single parent ca. 1990.

^dGini Index of Inequality.

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

***p < .001.

n.s. = not significant.

Source: Portes et al. (2003).

real and hard-to-change structural variable like inequality, rather than any miraculous social balsam, has the true causal effect on poverty. As with academic performance, states that were highly unequal decades ago have much greater relative poverty at present, regardless of how trusting or sociable their citizens happen to be.

The same story is revealed by the analysis of single parenthood rates, where the apparent effect of social capital is significantly reduced as soon as controls are introduced for lagged economic inequality, percent black population, and region. More is said below about the effects of ethnic composition and geographic location, but the key finding corroborates the notion that many of the apparent effects of social capital are just that. The SCI components correlate with other indicators of good quality of life, but once basic structural variables are brought into play, the alleged causal relationships between these indicators disappear.

There is an exception to this pattern, and it pertains to economic inequality itself. The effect of the SCI on the Gini Index does not disappear when other variables are controlled. This result suggests that civic attitudes and associational life, if not the universal panacea that *BA* alleges them to be, may have an

autonomous influence on at least one important outcome. If this is the case, the logical next question becomes where this social capital comes from and whether it can be produced or recreated in areas where it does not exist.

The Origins Question

It is clear from the preceding analysis that social capital and economic inequality are intimately related, with the latter accounting for most of the apparent effects of associational life and trust, but being in turn influenced by them. This suggests a causal loop. That hypothesis is supported by results in the first column of **Table 3**, which shows that lagged economic inequality, along with the level of education of a state's population, have strong effects on social capital. Both variables jointly account for 22% of variance in the SCI. Were the analysis to stop here, we would conclude that economic inequality is a key determinant of levels of social capital but that the latter in turn affects future inequality, leading to vicious circles in inegalitarian states and virtuous ones in those blessed with an early fairer wealth distribution.

Though elegant, this interpretation does not take into account the possibility that more

Table 3 Determinants of social capital

Predictors ^a	I	II	III	IV
Economic inequality, 1969 ^b	-0.396** (3.0)	0.212 n.s. (1.4)	-0.128 n.s. (0.5)	0.013 n.s. (0.1)
Poverty, 1969	0.021 n.s. (0.2)	0.023 n.s. (0.2)	0.021 n.s. (0.3)	0.002 n.s. (0.0)
Percent college graduates	0.289* (2.2)	0.353** (3.2)	0.176* (2.0)	0.261** (2.8)
Percent black population		-0.597*** (4.5)		-0.258* (2.2)
South		-0.357* (2.5)		
Confederate state			-0.230* (2.1)	-0.160 n.s. (1.4)
Percent Scandinavian-origin population			0.631*** (7.4)	0.552*** (6.2)
R ²	0.221	0.517	0.693	0.717
N = 50				

^aFigures are standardized regression coefficients (beta weights) of predictors of the Social Capital Index (SCI). T-ratios in parentheses.

^bGini Index.

*p < .05.

**p < .01.

***p < .001.

n.s. = not significant.

Source: Portes et al. (2003).

basic historical and demographic forces may be at play that affect both inequality and the associational and civic life of communities and states. As is well known, there are major regional differences in wealth and its distribution in the United States, with the South being generally at the bottom in both dimensions. Along the same lines, race has been a major historical cleavage in the history of the nation, with nonwhites confined to the bottom of the economic hierarchy and commonly excluded from the political and educational associations that really count. These more basic historical forces may have something to do with contemporary economic disparities and with the associational life of the citizenry.

Column II in **Table 3** supports this line of reasoning. With the historical variables controlled, economic inequality ceases to have any independent effect on social capital. Percent black population becomes, by far, the most powerful predictor, followed by education and region. Together, these variables succeed in increasing explained variance in the SCI to a respectable 52%. According to these results, non-southern states with a homogeneously white and better educated population are those where we find the higher stocks of civic life and community participation that *BA* so much praises.

Nonsouthern states with a predominantly white and more educated population were also those that received the great waves of European immigration in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Higham 1955, Thomas 1973, Portes & Rumbaut 1996). That immigration was diverse in origins and culture and was dominated by migrants from the British Isles, Germany, and Italy. One group, however, was highly distinct both in its settlement patterns and in its associational life. Norwegians, Swedes, Finns, and Icelanders tended to settle in northern states with climates as harsh or harsher than those they had left behind and to form tightly knit, self-sufficient communities where strong egalitarian traditions and participation in collective activities required for survival were the norm (Rosenblum 1973, Boe 1977, Kivisto 1984). No other European group

immigrated so disproportionately to northern Michigan and Wisconsin, Minnesota, and the Dakotas and no other established such strong, independent institutions of community life. Perhaps not by coincidence, these are the states that show the highest stocks in the map of social capital presented in *Bowling* (Putnam 2000, p. 293).

By extension, it is possible that the percentage of the population that is of Scandinavian origin can serve as a proxy for the patterns of community activism and collective life imported by certain European immigrants from their respective countries and implanted in the new land. These historical traditions may be at the root of both different levels of economic inequality and of civic and social activism observed a century later. Column III in **Table 3** presents results of this analysis. It strongly supports this line of reasoning by showing that, with percent Scandinavian controlled, economic inequality remains an insignificant predictor of social capital, and the effect of proportion of college graduates declines markedly. Percent Scandinavian origin in a state's population becomes, by far, the strongest influence on social capital, followed by membership in the southern Confederacy. Proportion of explained variance increases to 70%, indicating that these two historical variables, plus a residual effect of education, account for the bulk of the variance in the SCI.³

To examine whether membership in the southern Confederacy accounts for the previously observed effect of black population, we add that variable as a predictor in column IV of **Table 3**. When this is done, two important things happen: First, the effect of a state

³The North/South cleavage is so distinct in the geographical distribution of social capital that sheer average temperatures may be used as a proxy for the historical forces just discussed: the lower the temperature, the higher the social capital. Additional regressions (not shown) indicate that the gross effect of average winter temperatures on the SCI is very strong, exceeding eight times its standard error. Predictably, the effect of this proxy variable is significantly reduced when the actual historical variables accounting for these interstate differences are introduced.

having been part of the Confederacy, though still negative, becomes insignificant; second, the proportion of explained variance in social capital increases to 72%. Therefore, it is not the case that the influence of slavery on civic participation and associational life is limited to the South, for it extends, in fact, to the entire nation. The fundamental racial cleavage that Myrdal (1944) called in his time the “great American dilemma” is reflected in these figures. This cleavage is stronger in the former slave states, but it is present elsewhere and translates into both greater economic inequality and lower social capital.

Putnam noted in passing the existence of these causal forces but dismissed them with the comment that “whether patterns of immigration and slavery provide the sole explanation for contemporary differences in levels of social capital is an issue that deserves more concerted attention than I can devote to it here” (Putnam 2000, p. 294). That statement failed to recognize the theoretical and especially the practical implications of the causal patterns uncovered here. For if social capital is the outcome of historical forces buried deep in the nation’s past, there is little point in promoting it as a cure for social ills and exhorting citizens to become more participatory. Because social capital cannot be willed into existence but arises out of complex historical processes, such exhortations would have little effect on alleviating present social problems.

Fortunately for states and regions low on Putnam’s social capital, many of its supposed benefits are illusory. Under scrutiny, most of the alleged positive outcomes turn out to be either problematic in causal direction or a spurious consequence of more basic structural conditions. Efforts to improve these conditions—in particular increasing the educational level of the population and decreasing economic inequality—would go a long way toward producing the collective benefits, erroneously attributed to the “magic of social capital” (Putnam 2000, p. 288). The basic lessons of the preceding analysis, in particular the causal impact of racial diversity

on social capital and the limited effects of the latter on key collective outcomes, bear directly on contemporary immigration and its alleged effects. These are examined next.

SOCIAL CAPITAL AND ETHNIC DIVERSITY

These problems notwithstanding, Putnam has carried on with his research program. His more recent contention is that people living in diverse communities are more likely to experience isolation and declines in social capital, an argument that has become known as the “hunkering down” hypothesis (Putnam 2007). According to this new discovery, increases in immigration in the United States and Western Europe since 1960 have resulted in permanently high levels of ethnic diversity. Putnam ambivalently lauds the positive long-term effects of immigration for these societies, while contending that it has a corrosive effect on social capital and hence societal cohesion. Evidence from the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey (SCCBS), conducted in 2000 with over 29,000 respondents in 41 U.S. communities, bolsters the argument that the diversity associated with increasing immigration increases social isolation and, with it, a host of negative consequences along the lines described in *BA*. In Putnam’s (2007, p. 51) colorful metaphor, “diversity brings out the turtle in all of us.”

Recent Research

This thesis has awakened a great deal of attention and produced a veritable mountain of research with mostly contradictory results. In the United States, Alesina & LaFerrara (2002) investigated the determinants of social trust, as measured in the General Social Survey from 1974 to 1994. They found that racial fragmentation, as measured in the 1990 U.S. Census, had a significant negative effect on the proportion of trusting respondents even when controlling for inequality, ethnic ancestry fragmentation, and individual characteristics. Costa & Kahn (2003) found that racial diversity was

associated with lower civic engagement among 25- to 54-year olds in the form of volunteering in the DDB Lifestyle Survey (1975–1998) and organizational membership in the American National Election Survey (1974–1994).

Subsequent studies have added nuance to the assertion of a linearly negative relationship between diversity and various aspects of social capital. Stolle et al. (2008) report a negative association between contextual diversity (measured as the proportion of residents who are a “visible” minority) and social trust, but argue that the effect is greater for majority (white) respondents and that those who regularly interact with neighbors are less susceptible to the negative effects of community heterogeneity. Uslander (2010) uses Putnam’s own data set (the SCCBS) and reports a negative effect of contextual diversity for whites only. He also finds that the interaction of diversity and segregation in the United States drives down trust more than diversity alone does, with those living in integrated and diverse communities with diverse social networks more likely to trust others. Fieldhouse & Cutts (2010) underline the correlation of neighborhood diversity and poverty levels in the United States and show that the negative effect of diversity on social capital is a small fraction of the negative effect of poverty.

Studies of the relationship between diversity and social cohesion elsewhere have tended to focus on a limited number of countries, especially the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Australia, and the Netherlands. Evidence from the UK shows some support for Putnam’s thesis but also illustrates the importance of taking material deprivation and social interaction into account. Drawing on the 2001 UK Citizenship Survey, Letki (2008) investigated the impact of neighborhood-level racial heterogeneity on four dimensions of social capital: attitudes and opinions about neighbors and the neighborhood, informal sociability, formal volunteering, and informal help. She found that racial diversity was negatively associated with attitudes toward one’s neighbors and neighborhoods but uncovered little support for the “aversion

to heterogeneity” argument, given that racial diversity did not have a detrimental effect on informal sociability once neighborhood-level deprivation was taken into account. Laurence (2011) similarly finds a negative relationship between diversity and localized trust in the UK but shows that this association is reduced considerably by community-level deprivation. Sturgis & Smith (2010) find that the effect of ethnic heterogeneity depends on the kind of trust examined: Diversity has no relationship with generalized trust once compositional differences between areas are controlled, but there is a negative relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and trust in neighbors. Despite this negative relationship, these authors find that diversity accounts for a miniscule portion of the variability in strategic trust and that the effect is strongly moderated by neighborhood deprivation. Fieldhouse & Cutts (2010) report a negative relationship between diversity and both attitudinal and behavioral social capital in the UK but find that this effect depends on other contextual variables (especially poverty) and on the racial/ethnic background of the respondent.

Evidence from other countries similarly reveals that the relationship between ethno-racial heterogeneity and social capital is contingent on several factors. At the aggregate level, there appears to be a positive relationship between diversity and trust in Canadian cities, with the exception of Montreal (Kazemipur 2006). Stolle et al. (2008) report a negative relationship between contextual diversity and trust in Canada, with visible minorities less susceptible to this effect than the white majority. Phan (2008) finds that diverse friendship ties moderate the effect of city-level racial diversity, with residents of more diverse cities with more diverse friendship ties showing higher levels of social trust, whereas neighborhood-level racial diversity has no effect on trust in the presence of inequality. Leigh’s (2006) study of heterogeneity in Australia reports a strong negative relationship between ethno-linguistic fractionalization and localized trust (with a stronger effect of

linguistic heterogeneity) but finds little evidence of a negative relationship between diversity and generalized trust. In the Netherlands, Tolsma et al. (2009) find that the negative bivariate relationship between ethnic heterogeneity and three indicators of social capital is conditional on respondents' income and educational levels, as well as on the level at which diversity is measured: More affluent and highly educated respondents living in diverse neighborhoods report more contact with neighbors and more tolerance; municipal diversity is positively related to trust and negatively related to contact and volunteering among the highly educated.

Much of the research that has investigated the link between diversity and social cohesion has employed a cross-national research strategy, pooling respondents from a wide range of countries. Several studies have used data from multiple world regions. Bjørnskov (2007) draws, for example, on the World Values Survey and the Danish Social Capital Survey to show that ethnic heterogeneity across 76 countries is not significantly related to the proportion of a country's respondents identified as trusting, a finding that is confirmed by a study with the same data sources plus the Latinobarometer and Afrobarometer surveys, (Bjørnskov 2008). Despite the lack of association between ethnic heterogeneity and trust in Bjørnskov's studies, this research lends support to the hypothesis that income inequality is a consistently negative predictor of trust.

Other cross-national studies with samples from multiple world regions suggest that the relationship between diversity and cohesion at the country level may be moderated by good governance. Delhey & Newton (2005) report a strong negative bivariate correlation between ethnic fractionalization and average levels of generalized trust, but the association is significantly weakened in the presence of good government and national wealth. Another study of 44 countries using the World Values Survey (Anderson & Paskeviciute 2006) finds that ethnic diversity is not significantly associated with

trust, whereas linguistic diversity has a negative effect. However, the effect of linguistic diversity disappears when the sample is restricted to established democracies; weak democracies, on the other hand, show a negative relationship between linguistic heterogeneity and social trust.

Gesthuizen et al. (2009) use the 2004 Eurobarometer survey of 27,000 respondents in 28 European countries to examine determinants of interpersonal trust, informal social capital (contact frequency and social support), and formal social capital (participation in and donation to organizations). With an analytic sample limited to native-parentage respondents, ethnic fractionalization has no significant effect on any of the measures of social capital. In a similar study of 21 countries using the European Social Survey, Hooghe et al. (2009) also find that ethnic diversity is unrelated to generalized trust. These two studies also include measures of immigration-related diversity. Gesthuizen et al. find that migrant stock is not a significant predictor of any indicator of social capital, whereas average net migration between 1995 and 2000 had a negative effect on trust and a positive effect on informal social capital. Hooghe et al. include a host of measures of immigration and find that none of them is significantly and consistently related to generalized trust, once the analysis is adjusted for outliers.

Methodological Gaps and Conceptual Issues

The empirical evidence from various within- and cross-country studies lends only qualified support to Putnam's hunkering-down hypothesis. These "nuanced and inconsistent" findings (Sturgis & Smith 2010, p. 4) point to a variety of conceptual and methodological gaps in this research field, including the inconsistent conceptualization and operationalization of the core concepts of social capital, cohesion, and diversity; the multitude of levels of analysis; and the lack of sufficient attention to methodological issues of endogeneity and clustering.

The hunkering-down hypothesis linked diversity with lower levels of social capital and solidarity, but empirical studies of this relationship have used a wide array of dependent variables whose relationships to the concept of cohesion is not always apparent. Putnam and his followers have been raising the alarm of governments about the threat posed by migration-driven diversity. However, as seen above, a substantial number of studies suggest that it is not diversity per se but unequal diversity that makes a difference. According to these studies, when, by reason of spatial propinquity or lessened economic inequality, different ethnic groups come to interact more with one another, indicators of civiness or trust do not decline. Conversely, when ethnic differences are accompanied by high inequality and spatial segregation, these indicators suffer (Sturgis & Smith 2010, Hooghe et al. 2009, Uslaner 2006). These results are in line with those presented in the previous section that show that, according to Putnam's own data, racial diversity drives down social capital. These findings have been replicated by others, such as Alexander (2007), who also notes the opposite effects of higher education and a farming population in raising measures of trust.

Taken as a whole, this set of results suggests that, rather than an autonomous force, social capital—defined as communitarianism or trust—is really a by-product of more basic structural factors of which racial homogeneity, education, and economic equality are paramount. Communitarianism and trust are thus found in predominantly white, relatively affluent, and largely rural areas—of which towns in South Dakota (identified by Putnam as “awash in social capital”) are examples (Hallberg & Lund 2005). It is relatively easy to find bowling leagues in such towns, but these are epiphenomena of more basic factors.

Other authors, however, are adamant that it is diversity itself, which mass immigration necessarily increases, that leads to a decline in social capital. According to this view, even educated and relatively affluent immigrants will bring down social capital by virtue of their cultural

distinctness. Putnam (2007) himself emphasizes that, in areas of high diversity, even native-born whites come to distrust one another. If this is really the case, it is worth asking again whether this decline over which so much alarm has been raised is that important. As seen previously, there is reason to believe that many of the alleged benefits of social capital are largely illusory. Although Putnam and his followers have been keen on persuading us that the disappearance of associationism is nearly apocalyptic in its implications (Hallberg & Lund 2005), realities on the ground appear rather different.

Mutual trust and bowling leagues are nice things to have, but they do not represent a *sine qua non* for a viable society. To see this point more clearly, it is useful to return to the sociological classics—largely forgotten in the current debate—to seek guidance in understanding what is really taking place. Durkheim (1984 [1893]) distinguished between the “mechanical” solidarity of traditional societies—based on cultural homogeneity and mutual acquaintance—and the “organic” solidarity of modern societies—based on heterogeneity, role differentiation, and a complex division of labor. Other classic authors such as Toennies (1963 [1887]), Sombart (1982 [1911]), and Malinowski (1926) also stressed and developed the same idea.

The contemporary relevance of this distinction is twofold. First, it suggests that present calls to homogeneity and communitarianism are backward looking and, hence, reactionary. They promote a return to an idealized past—society as it presumably was and not as it really is or is likely to be in the future. Bucolic rural communities have always held a powerful attraction in American public culture, but they represent an ideal scarcely compatible with the requirements of a complex world. Second, there are other ways of organizing social life that foster individual growth and collective well-being and that do not depend on mechanical solidarity. Instead, they rely on increasing differentiation and diversity along with the organic integration of complex, multiple roles. We turn next to an analysis of what these forms are as a prelude

to examining the real effects of contemporary immigration.

COHESION IN THE MODERN WORLD

Stepping into a crowded metro in any modern metropolis may well represent the antithesis of Putnam's view of community: no one knows any one; there is scarcely any communication among passengers who regard each other with what Simmel (1964 [1902]) referred to as "a slight mutual aversion." Yet the train arrives at the appointed time; people step out to let others in or out; and they routinely use the service to get to their jobs and back. There is no community in the metro car; there are instead individuals, but individuals-in-roles following the rules of overarching institutions. This is the kind of cohesion that makes the modern world run: It does not depend on mutual acquaintance but on a set of norms that are understood and accepted by all and are enforced by specialized agencies. Large corporations and impersonal markets do not run on social capital; they operate instead on the basis of universalistic rules and their embodiment in specific roles. You do not know nor need to know the metro station clerk to hand in your money and receive your ticket; you do not have the slightest notion of who the train driver is, but you fully expect him to deliver you safely to your destination.

Organic solidarity, not communitarianism, coordinates the daily lives of millions in modern society and makes possible the achievement of both individual expectations and collective goals. If, after a hard day at the office, you decide to join your fellows at the bowling alley, that is just fine, but it is not a precondition or a requirement for your membership in society. As Durkheim (1984 [1893]) recognized more than a century ago, organic solidarity does not lead to disaffection and anomie, but to their opposite. The emotional identification that the individual feels with her nation or her metropolis does not depend on mutual acquaintance with all their members, but rather on shared values and the recognition of a common normative order

required for the fulfillment of individual goals. This is the type of cohesion that leads people to identify as citizens of a nation, fulfill their obligation toward it, and support it in times of need.

Organic solidarity depends on three conditions: (a) diversity among members of a society, (b) a complex division of labor, and (c) strong coordinating institutions. When these conditions exist, communitarian networks may or may not be present, but they are not required for the continuation of a viable social order. In some circumstances, community groups and voluntary associations may be a helpful add-on; in others, excessive communitarianism may actually create obstacles by advancing particularistic interests and narrow views over the universalistic goals of a democratic society. As Berman's (1997) analysis of the role of grassroots associations in the rise of the Nazi party in Germany reminds us, there can be severe downsides to this form of social capital. Because strong coordinating institutions are a necessary condition for organic solidarity and because they may or may not coexist with communitarianism, it is possible to observe in reality a plurality of forms of social organization. These are schematically summarized in **Figure 1**.

Cells in this figure represent ideal types of the forms in which societies may be organized. Cell A represents the Tocquevillian ideal of a strong public order backed by a mobilized citizenry. Presumably, this is also the situation favored by Putnam and his followers. Clearly, this situation is preferable to Cell D, where individualism and anomie threaten the collapse of society and the rise of a Hobbesian problem of order (Centeno & Portes 2006). The remaining cells are, however, of more theoretical interest. Social order is sustainable in both, but on a very different basis. Communitarian association can take the role of weak or absent coordinating institutions, but at the cost of reverting to mechanical solidarity. This is the situation portrayed in Cell C. Because community social capital is predicated on tight networks and mutual acquaintance, the resulting social order will necessarily be fragmented—a

		Communitarianism	
		HIGH	LOW
State/private coordinating institutions	STRONG	A Organic/mechanic solidarities: mobilized citizenry	B Organic solidarity: individualism and universalism
	WEAK	C Mechanic solidarity: fragmented communities	D Systemic breakdown

Figure 1

Types of macrosocial organization.

small-town world of semi-isolated, self-reliant communities.

Cell B represents the ideal type of organic solidarity, where an individualistic society operates through strong public coordinating institutions. Citizens connect with these institutions through established formal channels. Given the previously noted downsides of communitarianism, it is not necessarily the case that this situation is less preferable to that of Cell A. Although decried as atomistic by the advocates of social capital, the sway of impartial universalistic rules is less challenged in these instances than in those where a mobilized populace creates organized groups, each seeking to advance its own particularistic interests. In such cases, community social capital may create a significant obstacle to the rule of law and the viability of public institutions (Almond & Verba 1965, Berman 1997).

In reality, advanced complex nations operate somewhere between Cells A and B, where the overarching cohesion created through organic solidarity is supplemented by manifold forms of associations—from informal groupings to organized special interests. Least developed societies subsist somewhere between Cells C and D, where the mechanical solidarity of extended families and tribal networks keeps a semblance of order in the face of weak or absent coordinating institutions. The cases of so-called failed states, such as Somalia or Haiti, provide examples. The push toward more social capital blinds us to its negative aspects and its

limitations. Although communitarianism is an appealing ideal, it cannot provide the basis for the organization of a modern democratic society and, when practiced in excess, may actually threaten its stability.

THE ROLE OF IMMIGRATION

The discovery that immigration reduces cultural homogeneity and communitarianism is perfectly reasonable. The alarm following that discovery is not. In terms of the preceding typology, high migration moves host societies somewhat from Cell A to Cell B, but the presence of strong institutions averts any risk of systemic breakdown. This is indeed what has happened: Although unauthorized migration poses some problems for the authorities, the weight of modern institutions is quite sufficient to insure that the flow of newcomers is properly channeled. No developed nation in North America or Western Europe has been seriously challenged by mass migration; the feel and the sights at street level have changed considerably, but the core institutions of these societies have remained intact (Castles 2004, Hollifield 2004).

What migration does accomplish is to increase demographic and cultural diversity. The coziness of homogeneous communities is shaken by the presence of migrants from so many different cultural origins. Their arrival does not actually challenge the class structure that, like core institutions, remains the same,

but rather alters the composition of the working classes. The diversity created by mass migration in the working population is actually a good thing. As seen previously, diversity is necessary for a complex division of labor grounded on organic solidarity. In the contemporary world, an ethnically homogeneous and aging population poses an arguably greater challenge to the long-term survival of advanced societies than the presence of immigrants (Alba & Nee 2003, Castles 2004, Massey 2007). The latter represent a much needed injection of youth and energy and a force slowing down demographic decline (Massey et al. 2002).

The argument that immigration reduces social capital has inevitably brought Putnam and his followers into the company of conservative nativists and restrictionists, including his late Harvard colleague Samuel Huntington (2004). In a sense, Putnam has been caught in the web of his own doctrine: If social capital is an unqualified public good and mass immigration reduces it, then the latter must be an unmitigated public evil. As just seen, however, those alarmed by this argument may rest at ease. Communitarianism and expressions of trust in public surveys are neither the universal balm predicted by social capitalists, nor necessary conditions for the proper functioning of modern society. The latter can operate indefinitely on the basis of a higher form of cohesion.

As seen in previous sections, empirical studies have shown Putnam's SCI to be a correlate or a consequence of more basic processes such as economic inequality and racial segregation. These processes are the ones deserving attention, for they do threaten the long-term viability of modern democratic societies. The solidarity of these societies is ultimately predicated on the opportunities they offer to all to fulfill their individual goals. Systematic denial of such opportunities to large numbers on the basis of their race or ethnic origin is inimical to higher forms of cohesion based on universalistic and impartial rules.

In synthesis, immigration does increase demographic and cultural diversity, but the dangers associated with this trend are illusory. This

diversity contributes to the long-term viability of nations dependent on modern, not backward, forms of association. To the extent that newcomers are incorporated in ways that reduce the inevitable initial inequalities and offer opportunities for upward mobility to their offspring, the effects of immigration will be to strengthen the receiving economies and rejuvenate their populations. The decline in old-time bowling leagues and in generalized expressions of trust is a small price to pay for these benefits.

CONCLUSION

The determination and rhetorical skill with which Putnam succeeded in wresting the concept of social capital away from its sociological creators; persuading authorities and the general public about the central importance of his own version of the concept; and, of late, scaring them with the announcement of its disappearance due to immigration and ethnic diversity have been remarkable. At some point, historians of ideas will have much to say about this unique intellectual trajectory. At present, a veritable industry has emerged to analyze indicators of trust and other dimensions linked to Putnam's social capital, and measures of the same populate the social surveys of many nations. A secondary literature has also emerged to analyze methodological issues associated with these studies, including the proper measures of trust, the differing ways of assessing diversity, and the nature of the relationships between diversity, trust, and cohesion.

Although analyzing expressions of trust in public surveys and measures of grassroots communitarianism is a perfectly legitimate intellectual enterprise, we have eschewed in this review a detailed discussion of its multiple (and largely contradictory) findings and of the methodological issues they pose in favor of considering a more general question. That question may be phrased succinctly as: What is the fuss really about? Or, more specifically, has the enormous investment in time and money to investigate communitarian social capital been worth it? A subsidiary question is whether the

diversity brought about by contemporary immigration poses a significant threat to the host societies.

The answers depend on two considerations: first, whether social capital, in Putnam's version, represents a major collective resource causing a wide variety of positive outcomes; and second, whether communitarianism and interpersonal trust represent the best or the only ways of producing social cohesion in modern societies. Results of our empirical and conceptual analyses answer both questions in the negative. Empirically, many of the alleged benefits of communitarian social capital turn out to be correlates, rather than consequences; most of these correlations are jointly dependent, in turn, on more basic structural factors of which inequality, level of education of the population, and its racial-ethnic composition are paramount. Once these factors are controlled, the alleged beneficial effects of social capital largely disappear.

Second, a theoretical analysis of the organizational basis of modern society demonstrates that it does not depend on interpersonal networks or mutual expressions of trust. A simple excursion into the sociological classics suffices to remind us that the glue that keeps modern society together is not the mechanical solidarity associated with such networks, but a higher form of cohesion associated with a complex division of labor and the strength of institutions. Trust in these societies does not depend on mutual knowledge, but on universalistic rules and the capacity of institutions to compel their observance. Not surprisingly, empirical studies have shown that good governance in regions and nations increases trust and eliminates the alleged negative effects of diversity (Delhay & Newton 2005).

This being the case, the question of whether immigration brings about diversity and, hence, reduces communitarianism loses much of its urgency. Apocalyptic warnings to the contrary, the issue of whether immigration increases discomfort among members of a formerly homogeneous population and leads to their

hunkering down is not all that crucial. The research literature is not nearly unanimous in confirming that this pattern holds, but even granting that some people choose to disconnect in the face of increasing diversity, that cost pales in comparison with the benefits that immigration brings to host societies. Confronted with an aging population and the need for new skilled and unskilled labor supplies in many sectors of their economies, there are few avenues other than sustained immigration for these societies to rejuvenate themselves.⁴

The answers to the preceding questions have an important corollary: Preoccupation with declining expressions of trust and with alleged effects of diversity serves to detract attention from real and far more urgent problems. While some academics and policy makers wring their hands about how to increase participation in local associations and make people express more trust in each other, solutions to basic problems such as how to fashion an immigration policy that effectively incorporates newcomers fall by the wayside. In the United States, the millions of dollars spent in investigating whether public trust is declining or whether immigration reduces it could have been more fruitfully invested in devising a labor management program that flexibly incorporates immigrants

⁴The recent recession and rising levels of domestic unemployment provide evidence against the need for new foreign labor supplies. However, two considerations counter this argument. First, the long-term trend has been for a sustained and growing demand both for skilled foreign professionals and technicians and for manual labor, as documented in several government reports (Congressional Budget Office 2005, 2010). The present situation, brought about by financial mismanagement on a massive scale, is exceptional and unlikely to set the long-term course of the economy. Second, even today, specific sectors of the American economy continue to source their labor needs abroad. The annual report of the Office of Immigration Statistics shows that hundreds of thousands of foreign professionals and their families continued to arrive in recent years. At the same time, the flow of unauthorized workers for agricultural and other labor-intensive sectors, though diminished, has continued on a mass scale (Massey 2009, Office of Immigration Statistics 2009, Passel 2009). These figures give clear evidence that the need for foreign labor represents a structural feature of the American economy.

and that establishes paths to promote the economic and social integration of them and their offspring.

Pseudo-problems have their costs. Although cries of alarm about declining social capital in

the face of diversity have undoubtedly struck a chord, it is doubtful that the vast research program spawned by such fears has made American society any better or its public policies any more effective.

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