



Democracies in Flux: The Evolution of Social Capital in Contemporary Society

Robert D. Putnam

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In his national bestseller *Bowling Alone*, Robert Putnam illuminated the decline of social capital in the US. Now, in *Democracies in Flux*, Putnam brings together a group of leading scholars who broaden his findings as they examine the state of social capital in eight advanced democracies around the world.

The book is packed with many intriguing revelations. The contributors note, for instance, that waning participation in unions, churches, and political parties seems to be virtually universal, a troubling discovery as these forms of social capital are especially important for empowering less educated, less affluent portions of the population. Indeed, in general, the researchers found more social grouping among the affluent than among the working classes and they find evidence of a younger generation that is singularly uninterested in politics, distrustful both of politicians and of others, cynical about public affairs, and less inclined to participate in enduring social organizations. Yet social capital appears as strong as ever in Sweden, where 40% of the adult population participate in "study circles"--small groups who meet weekly for educational discussions.

Social capital--good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse--is vitally important both for the health of our communities and for our own physical and psychological well being. Offering a panoramic look at social capital around the world, this book makes an important contribution to our understanding of these phenomena and why they are important in today's world.

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