

5 Democracy and social capital*

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In August 1996, the Uslaner family took its annual sojourn to the Delaware beaches. On the way, I stopped to buy some fruit at a local stand. There was a lot of fruit and quite a few customers, but no one was minding the store. Instead, a sign directed people to put their money in a locked mailbox and take what they paid for. One of the customers seemed very impressed. He turned to others and said, “How trusting!” I bought my fruit, paid, and felt a bit warmer toward society. A week and a half later, I left a cooler to guard a parking space to load the car to go back to our rental house. When I got back with the car, the space was still there, but the cooler was gone. My wife turned to me and said, “You believe too much in what you write about. You trust people too much.”

Replacing the cooler would cost about \$15. The savings on the fruit, compared to buying at a neighboring stand under the watchful eye of a salesperson, was just a dollar or two. Was this a bad deal? Would I have been better off not being so trusting?

In the short run, yes. But in the long run, no. Trust in others has important payoffs. It helps to create a vibrant and virtuous community where people know their neighbors, join together in voluntary associations, give of themselves, and commit themselves to moral codes: “Virtuous citizens

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are helpful, respectful, and trustful toward one another, even when they differ on matters of substance” (Putnam 1993: 89).

Trust matters because it is part, perhaps the most essential part, of *social capital*. Putnam (1995a), following Coleman (1990: 300), argues that “social capital” refers to features of social organization, such as core values and norms (including social trust) and networks, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. He argues (Putnam 1993: 169) that social capital is a “moral resource.” This, I believe, is critical. I consider social capital to reflect primarily a system of values, especially social trust. Civic networks may enhance social life, but this “social connectedness” (Uslaner 1996a) is distinct from – and secondary to – moral values.

Both social capital and connectedness are important for what they produce. Communities with strong positive values (including trust in others) and ties that bind people to one another will have more powerful norms of generalized reciprocity and cooperation. Trust as a moral resource leads us to look beyond our own kind. It means that we downplay bad experiences and cooperate even when we are not sure that others will oblige (see Uslaner, in press; Whiteley 1996; Wuthnow 1997; and Mansbridge, this volume, pp. 290–307).

Trust makes for a vibrant community in several ways. Trust promotes cooperation (Putnam 1993: 171). It leads people to take active roles in their community, to behave morally, and to compromise. People who trust others aren’t quite so ready to dismiss ideas they disagree with. When they can’t get what they want, they are willing to listen to the other side. Communities with civic activism and moral behavior, where people give others their due, are more prosperous.

Trust in other people is in shorter supply today than it was in the 1960s, and that is something to worry about. Our society is nastier than it used to be. “In your face” and “dissing” are commonplace, sometimes even preferred, ways of dealing with others. Voices are more shrill in everyday life and in the world of policy-making. It is difficult to reach compromises when people don’t respect one another’s viewpoints (Uslaner 1993). Fewer people now take part in their communities and fewer trust each other. My task is to show, both theoretically and empirically, why there is a linkage between these two trends.

First, I discuss what trust is. Trust is not of one piece. We may trust those who are most like ourselves, or we may take greater risks for a more general form of trust. Only the latter is a form of social capital that you can invest and hope to reap additional income from that initial down payment. Particularized trust (of your own kind) entails little risk, but won’t make you – and the wider community – either prosperous or

vibrant. Generalized trust flourishes in democracies, while particularized trust is more typical of authoritarian and totalitarian societies. Generalized trust makes people more willing to take part in their communities and to endorse moral commitments. Particularized trust makes people withdraw from civic life. There have been parallel declines in civic participation and in social trust.

And then I link the two patterns. I briefly consider arguments from critics who doubt the existence of either trend. And then I move to larger issues again: What is the relationship between trust and democracy? Why has trust declined and what, if anything, can we do about it? There is one solution that is appealing, if not immediately intuitive: People who participate in (or attend) sporting events are more trusting and join more (non-sports) voluntary associations.

The varieties of trust

Trust is a rational gamble that cooperation with others will ultimately pay off, as well as a commitment to “prosocial” behavior even if others don’t always reciprocate (Bates 1988). But it is still a wager. If you bet the wrong way, you could lose a lot. You will be the “sucker” in a prisoner’s dilemma game. So people rely on their experiences, updating their expectations of others’ behavior from their interactions with others (Gauthier 1986: 156; Hardin 1992). If most of the people you meet are trustworthy, trusting others is reasonable. Trusters are more likely to cooperate in prisoner’s dilemma games (Deutsch 1960). Fruit stands can operate on the honor system, and people will help each other without demanding, or even expecting, something in return.

If you live in a “mean world” where most people *don’t* trust others, it makes sense for you not to invest too much of your social capital. It’s a losing proposition and you’ll be lucky if you escape with the loss of something so trivial as a cooler. In Montegrano, Sicily, Banfield (1958) found a society where people believed that “. . . any advantage that may be given to another is necessarily at the expense of one’s own family. One cannot afford the luxury of charity, which is giving others more than their due, or even justice, which is giving them their due.” Daily life in Montegrano is “brutal and senseless” (Banfield 1958: 109), much like Hobbes’s “nasty, brutish, and short” existence. All who stand outside the immediate family are “potential enemies,” battling for the meager bounty that nature has provided. People seek to protect themselves from the “threat of calamity” (Banfield 1958: 110).

Even Montegransans must trust *somebody*. Everyone – and all species – depend on others. Models from evolutionary biology suggest that

reciprocity, which stems from trust, is essential for survival (first) and prosperity (second). Animals compete with each other for food and for status. Without a moral conscience, they have little incentive to share or to help each other. Yet, they do much of the time. Animals rely upon each other to share food and to warn that predators are near. But animals help out only their kin or members of their species (Hamilton 1964: 21; Trivers 1971: 48). That's all they need to do. Such reciprocity will ensure the survival of the species. People in experimental situations are also more likely to reciprocate with friends (Trivers 1971; Masters 1989: 169). Messick and Brewer (1983: 27–28, italics in original) review experiments on cooperation and find that “members of an in-group tend to perceive other in-group members in generally favorable terms, particularly as being *trustworthy, honest, and cooperative.*”

We can minimize our risks by cooperating only with our own kind or our close friends. People will burrow themselves into their own communities and trust only people they know: what Yamigishi and Yamigishi (1994) call “particularized trust.” The more dependent we are on our close associates and kin, the more we think of the world in terms of “we” and “they.” We won't trust “most people.” Reciprocity among one's own kind ensures evolutionary “fitness,” in the language of biological models. Particularized trust may suffice for animals, which do not make moral judgments as humans do. It also may work for people who rarely come into contact with people outside their immediate communities. In an interdependent world where people come into contact with strangers, trust in most people – what Yamigishi and Yamigishi (1994) call “generalized trust” – assumes a more important role. If societies are to do more than reproduce themselves, if they are to prosper, their members must interact with others. And they must make the rational gamble that others are trustworthy.

In this more expansive web, particularized trust will be inimical to social capital. We need to go beyond our kin and in-groups to trust a wide range of people, especially those whom we don't know and who are different from us. Charitable contributions exemplify this dilemma. Voluntary giving helps make a community prosperous by reducing poverty and helping the underprivileged to make a fresh start. But if we give only to our own kind, we limit what charity can do. For both ethical and practical reasons, most theological approaches to giving urge people to help strangers as well as compatriots.

For cooperation in a diverse society to emerge as the dominant strategy, a *majority* must be cooperators for the good to dominate over the nasty (Bendor and Swistak 1991). And the more widespread cooperation is, the more prosperous the community will be. Montegransans get

trapped in long-term poverty because they trust only their own families. When people withdraw from – or become hostile to – the larger society, they hurt themselves as well as their perceived enemies.

The distinction between generalized and particularized trust helps solve a puzzle that has dogged those of us who believe that social capital is important. Skeptics and critics argue that social connections – and, by implication, trust – don't always serve the public good. The Ku Klux Klan, militia movements, and gangs are voluntary associations. But few would say they contribute to a virtuous society.

The Klan, militia groups, and gangs (among others) do many of the same things that “socially desirable” civic associations do. They have meetings, raise funds, and even may promote social activities. Yet they promote behavior that virtually everybody else considers repugnant. These groups are based on particularized trust: Have faith only in your own kind.; others are out to get you. Only people who trust widely can produce social capital.

Montegrans, as insular in their own way as the militias and the Klan, perpetuate their poverty when they withhold trust from strangers. Particularized trusters keep to themselves. They often develop secret rituals that only members know and in which only members may partake. They don't play in the more encompassing games of the larger society. They withdraw from them and often try to subvert them.

As the Maryland lottery television ads used to say, “You've got to play to win.” It is tough to prosper when you aren't willing to take risks. If we could tell who would reciprocate and who wouldn't, we could choose when we wanted to play and when we wanted to withdraw (Frank 1988). Yet, we can't tell who is trustworthy and who is not when we walk down the street. So we often use a risk-averse strategy by trusting only our own kind. Much of our social life revolves around groups we identify with, so we minimize risk when we stick with people we know. Even if we don't know individuals, we often have more faith in people like ourselves. They share our values and may protect us from being exploited by “alien” groups (Greif 1993).

When you play this game, you might protect your species and help it to reproduce, much as animals do. But you won't prosper. Animals don't worry about affluence (or much else). If sharing with kin ensures the survival of the species, that's all to the good. Most people want more. And that means accepting risks, such as dealing with and even trusting strangers. Nations do this when they trade with other nations. Trade creates growth, but it also entails risks. Countries open their markets to countries with different economies and different cultures. Economic nationalists worry that trading can be dangerous. But when people emulate

animals and stay with their own kind, they limit what they can achieve for their communities, both materially and morally. At least in market economies, generalized trust promotes economic growth and greater investment (Knack and Keefer 1996).

Similarly, trusting others means tolerating people who are different from ourselves. Particularized trusters, such as religious fundamentalists, worry that exposure to people unlike themselves might corrupt their own sense of values. So activist fundamentalists withdraw from participation in secular organizations. More liberal religious activists, who are more likely to be generalized trusters, become strongly involved in their local communities (Uslaner 1998). A tolerant society will be less rancorous and more open to compromise. It won't be so difficult for such a community to solve collective-action problems that might otherwise fester (Uslaner 1993).

Trust may make a society healthy and wealthy (if not wise). When people trust each other, they are more likely to accommodate others' preferences – and make for a more pleasant society with a better quality of life. Trust may not produce wealth directly. Yet, through tolerance, it will promote trade that in turn leads to greater prosperity.¹

The two types of trust: measurement

I measure generalized trust by a question posed in a large number of surveys: "Do you believe that most people can be trusted or can't you be too careful in dealing with people?" While some (Smith 1996) have argued that this is not a good question, I disagree. It measures confidence in strangers, just as an indicator of generalized trust ought to do. There are no good questions on particularized trust.² The closest I can get with extant data may be measures of in- and out-group identifications. I constructed indices of in-group and out-group affects from feeling thermometers in the 1992 American National Election Study (Uslaner 1996). In- and out-groups are defined by demographic characteristics

¹ A study of civic engagement in the Philadelphia area by the Pew Center for The People and The Press (Kohut 1997) asked people a wide variety of trust questions. The overall social trust question scaled with items indicating trust in people that respondents are not particularly close to (including people who work in stores where you shop, people you meet on the street, and neighbors). The social trust measure did not scale with people that respondents are likely to be closer to (people at your church, your co-workers and boss, your family, and people you see at clubs). These results come from a factor analysis with promax (oblique) rotation. I employed 16 measures of trust, yielding a three-dimensional solution.

² The World Values Studies ask whether people trust their own families, immigrants, and other nationalities. But these questions don't seem to fit the bill well either theoretically (almost all people trust their own families) or empirically.

or self-identification with social or political groupings. To avoid the problem that some groups may be viewed more favorably by most people, I subtract the means from the calculated scores for each group and then compute an average for in-groups and out-groups.

Particularized trust is not of one piece. There are different reactions to demographic and political groups. Demographic groups include Asian-Americans, blacks, whites, Hispanics, Southerners, Catholics, and Jews. "Political" groups include the poor, liberals, conservatives, union members, feminists, and fundamentalists.³ How do we interpret these measures? Suppose that whites rate white people more highly than all races do. They would have positive *in-group* scores. This could be a sign of pride. But it more likely points to tribalism and distrust of people unlike yourself. Positive scores for *out-groups* indicate greater tolerance of ideas you don't adhere to. If you are not a fundamentalist but rate adherents highly, you will have positive scores.

The in-group and out-group measures contain some surprises, perhaps reflecting the less-than-ideal measurement strategy, but also indicative of how demographic and political groups have different effects on generalized trust. There are four components of particularized trust: demographic in-groups and out-groups and political in-groups and out-groups. But only two – demographic in-groups and political out-groups – shape generalized trust. Trusters are slightly *more* likely to rate their own political groups highly (11.754) than mistrusters (11.127), a difference that is not significant ($p < 0.23$, $r = 0.018$). Trusters are more tolerant of others and are more likely to favor policies that promote civil rights for blacks, women, gays, and other minorities (Rosenberg 1956; Uslaner 1994). Yet they don't necessarily *like* other people any more than mistrusters. The mean scores for demographic out-groups are -1.631 for trusters and -1.739 for mistrusters ($p < 0.43$, $r = 0.004$).⁴ Even so, we cannot rule out attitudes toward demographic out-groups as a measure of particularized trust. First, generalized and particularized trust, at least as I have measured them, are not simple substitutes for each other.⁵ Second, attitudes toward out-groups play a key role in the theoretical treatment of particularized trust. Montegransans are fearful of outsiders. So even though we don't observe a strong relationship between generalized trust and this measure of particularized trust, we should not dismiss

³ Putting the poor in the "political" grouping is a judgment call. One does not choose to become poor as one adopts an ideological or fundamentalist orientation. But being poor is also not an ascriptive characteristic such as race or religion. And it may not be so enduring.

⁴ The t-test is one-tailed.

⁵ If they were, we would expect a negative correlation between evaluations of demographic in-groups and out-groups. Instead, the correlation is strongly positive (0.522).

its role. As the theory of social capital would expect, people who have little affect for demographic out-groups withdraw from civic activity (see below).

People who see view their own demographic groups positively are not just showing pride. They are sending a message of exclusivity. Trusters rate their own demographic groups far less positively (1.864) than mistrusters (6.899). They can put faith in others because they are less committed to their own kind – and significantly so ($p < 0.0001$, $r = -0.134$). But trusters are wary of people whom they view as suspect, especially their political opponents. Perhaps they see those on the other side of the political fence as “special interests.” And they might view their adversaries as too confrontational – and, hence, not trustworthy. The differences between trusters and non-trusters for political out-groups are sharp ($p < 0.0001$, $r = -0.196$). Trusters have an average score of -5.387 , compared to a positive score (0.448) for mistrusters.

Our views of generalized and particularized trust are highly stylized. The former is universally good, the latter unconditionally bad. But this view may be too simplistic. We would certainly be better off if the world had more people who are willing to invest their faith in others. Yet, few people do so unconditionally. Everybody distrusts someone and some groups (Sullivan et al. 1981).

Trust matters

Trust matters – sometimes a lot. Generalized trust in others leads people to join voluntary associations (Putnam 1995a; Brehm and Rahn 1997; Uslaner 1996b). It also makes them more likely to engage in a variety of other collective actions. Consider the range of activities that generalized trusters are more likely to engage in: voting, using the presidential campaign fund checkoff on federal income tax forms, working on community problems, giving to charity, volunteering time, and being willing to serve on a jury.

Trust in others is most important when we most need it. The effects are small for turnout, the checkoff, work on community problems, and charitable contributions. These are “consensual activities.” People either (claim to) do them or don’t. More than 70 percent of respondents are in the modal category for these consensual activities: 78 percent said that they give to charity, 77.6 percent don’t work on a community problem, 76.6 percent said that they vote, and 71.2 percent do not contribute to the presidential campaign fund. There is far less accord on volunteering and serving on a jury: 36.5 percent say that they volunteer (cf. Wuthnow 1991: 20), while 37.1 percent are not willing to serve on a jury.

Almost 65 percent of people are in the modal category for nonconsensual activities, compared to an average of 76 percent for the consensual endeavors. The differences are not always large, but there seems to be a threshold around 70 percent. The correlation between the statistical “effect” for trust in people and the percent in the modal category for the null model is -0.92 .⁶ Generalized trust matters most on nonconsensual acts.

Particularized trust works to counter the effects of generalized trust. An ecumenical faith in people leads us to take part in a wide variety of collective-action measures. Particularized trust mostly leads people to withdraw from civic life. For the sorts of interactions that bring us into contact with strangers, evaluations of people who are different from ourselves matter mightily. For jury service and volunteering, the measures of particularized (demographic) trust have by far the strongest effects of any variables. On giving to charity, particularized trust ranks behind only religion and income. And people who have positive views of demographic out-groups are more likely to vote.

Attitudes toward political groups largely, though not exclusively, shape actions in the political realm. People with negative views of political out-groups are more likely to be mobilized to vote (and to volunteer). But people who have more positive attitudes toward their political opponents are more likely to use the campaign checkoff. The federal funds, after all, benefit both your own side and the opposition.

Trust also shapes moral behavior. Trusters are more likely to say that it is wrong to buy stolen goods, to claim government benefits they are not entitled to, to keep money they are not entitled to, and to fail to make a report after hitting someone’s car (Uslaner in press).⁷ Trust has no

⁶ The “effect” refers to an estimate of the impact of an independent variable in a probit analysis (see Rosenstone and Hansen 1993). Probit permits us to estimate the probability that a person performs an action such as voting (the dependent variable). The effect tells us the impact of a particular independent variable (such as trust). It is defined as the difference in estimated probabilities from the predictor’s highest and lowest values, letting other independent variables take their “natural” values. So the impact for trust is estimated by first treating all respondents as mistrusters (trust = 0) and estimating the expected probability of voting (giving to charity, etc.). Then we “pretend” that all respondents have become trusters (trust = 1) and recalculate the mean probabilities. The “effect” is the difference in the mean probabilities.

⁷ These are all based on multivariate regression analyses. The pattern of trust is different in Canada and the United Kingdom. In Canada, trust has no effect on seven of the eight measures of moral behavior. Only claiming benefits has a significant impact, and then barely ($p < 0.10$). In the United Kingdom, trust affects buying stolen goods, joyriding, lying, and keeping money. Trust matters most in Britain for dealings among individuals rather than in one’s interaction with the state. For somewhat different approaches to moral behavior, see Knack and Keefer (1996). The former uses aggregate data, the latter the World Values Study survey. Knack and Keefer envision moral values as a second measure of social capital in addition to trust that helps predict economic growth.

significant effect on approval of joyriding, lying in your own interest, cheating on taxes, and avoiding paying a fare on public transportation. On moral behavior, as on collective action, trust has stronger effects when there is less consensus on what is appropriate behavior. The correlation between the statistical effect and the level of consensus on moral behavior is -0.600 . This relationship is much weaker for moral behavior than for collective action (it is statistically significant only at $p < 0.06$). The level of consensus is a moderate-to-weak predictor of what is moral behavior. In the United States (though not in Canada or the United Kingdom), what drives attitudes toward morality is the stakes involved. When the effects of doing the wrong thing are greatest, trust matters most. A measure of “big effects” correlates with the impact of trust at -0.92 .⁸

Trust matters over a wide range of types of moral behavior and collective action. And there is a clear distinction between generalized and particularized trust. While the effects of social trust on collective action are not always – or even usually – large, they are consistent. No other variable affects as many types of collective action as generalized trust. When we combine multiple measures of participation into a single index, there are even more powerful effects. Beyond education and income, only frequency of prayer clearly trumps trust in other people when we predict public participation in civic and social activities (Uslaner 1996).

Trust plays a key role in creating a vibrant community. So do other measures of social capital: values such as religious ideals and social egalitarianism and ties to one’s community – being married, knowing and talking to neighbors, living in the same community for many years, and being a union member. When people trust each other, they are more likely to take an active role in their community. Active and virtuous people overcome collective action problems more readily.

Opting out

When people don’t trust each other, they often take potshots at each other. But they may tire of the fray and simply withdraw from active participation. Americans have always been joiners. When Alexis de Tocqueville visited the new nation in the early nineteenth century, he was struck by the vitality of civic life (1945: 109): “As soon as several of the inhabitants of the United States have taken up an opinion or a feeling

⁸ The measure of “big effects” classifies buying stolen goods, claiming benefits, keeping money, and hitting a car at 1; lying at 0.5; and the other measures at 0. The correlation here is not with probit effects, since the estimates in Uslaner (in press) are regression coefficients. The correlations for the regression coefficients for Britain and Canada are -0.34 and 0.19 , respectively.

which they wish to promote in the world, they look out for mutual assistance; and as soon as they have found one another out, they combine. From that moment they are no longer isolated men, but a power seen from afar, whose actions are seen from afar and whose language is listened to.” But Americans are no longer so committed to their communities. By a variety of measures, they are withdrawing from civic life.

As Putnam (1995a) and others have noted, civic participation has fallen in a wide range of activities from the 1960s onward. Fewer people vote, write to public officials, work for political parties, attend church or synagogue, belong to labor unions, belong to parent-teachers associations, volunteer their time (Hayge 1991; Brudney 1990), belong to fraternal organizations such as the Lions, Elks, Jaycees, Shriners, or Masons, or simply belong to voluntary organizations.

Why have people withdrawn from social life? Americans have lost faith in each other. Trust in other people is a key factor in many forms of participation. When people trust only their own kind, they withdraw from civic life. I turn next to an analysis of different types of trust and how trust in most people has declined over time. This is the key to why we see a decline in some forms of participation and a stagnation in other forms, even when we expect an *increase*. And then I consider why levels of trust have fallen and what we might do about it.

Where has trust gone?

Americans join fewer groups than they used to, though the drop has not been quite as sharp as we initially thought (Helliwell and Putnam 1996). The trends in social trust track the decline in membership in voluntary associations particularly well (Putnam 1995a, 1995b). Here we have a striking confirmation of a core prediction of the social capital approach. As trust in others falls, so does participation in civic activities. Figure 5.1 documents the decline in trust in other people from the first time the question was asked in a national survey in the United States (1960) to the most recent data point (1995).⁹ In 1960, 58 percent of Americans believed that “most people can be trusted.” By 1994 and 1995, a bit more than one-third (35 percent) of Americans had faith in their fellow men and women.

⁹ The sources of the data points are 1960, Civic Culture Study (Almond and Verba 1963); 1964, 1966, 1968, 1974, 1992, American National Election Studies; 1979, Temple University Institute for Survey Research; 1981, World Values Study; 1995, Washington Post/Kaiser Family Foundation/Harvard University survey; and all other years, the General Social Survey. The 1964, 1966, and 1968 ANES surveys exclude the black oversamples. The figures omit people who did not respond.

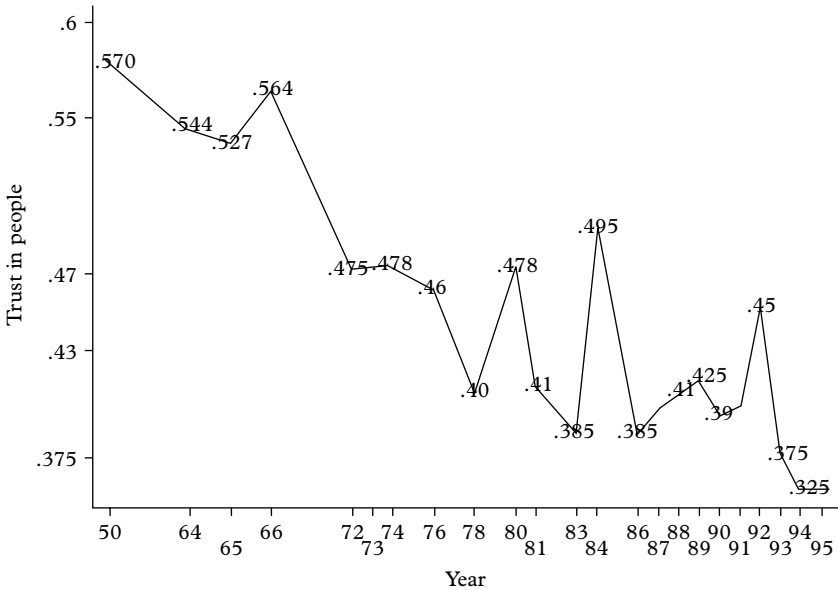


Figure 5.1 Trust in people over time

This decrease in trust produced a double whammy. First, people who trust others are more likely to participate in civic life, so fewer trusters means fewer participants. Second, social capital must be contextual. Individuals aren't lone rangers. The "Lake Wobegon effect" holds that friendly communities encourage participation. Evolutionary models of collective action games posit a threshold effect for contextual effects (Bendor and Swistak 1991). A disease, the spread of a rumor, or social trust must reach a certain critical level before it becomes contagious. When there is a lot of social capital to go around, its effects will be powerful. Even a Scrooge will feel the need to behave better in a world populated by Bob Cratchitts. Contextual trust matters most when it is plentiful. When individual-level social capital declines, there is less contextual trust to go around, and its impact will be smaller (Uslaner 1996).¹⁰

I estimate models of turnout for 1964 and 1992 from the American National Election Studies to test the impacts of individual-level and contextual trusts in two eras. In 1964, trust was relatively high. It hovered around the 50 percent mark that Bendor and Swistak (1991) argue is essential to sustain cooperation in collective-action games. By 1992, trust

¹⁰ Contextual trust is the mean value of trust for a region. In the ANES data, there are not sufficient cases to derive contextual measures for each state.

had fallen to less than 40 percent, hardly enough to change the Scrooges into Cratchitts.

Social capital proved more important at the individual level and less at the contextual level in 1992 than in 1964. In the more trusting era, all sorts of people voted and participated in other ways, such as joining voluntary organizations. So it didn't matter quite so much whether you were a truster or not in 1964. Individual-level trust did not have a significant impact on turnout.¹¹ By 1992, trust mattered; it was a significant predictor of turnout ($p < 0.05$). In an era with less social capital, trusters were more likely to participate than mistrusters. When fewer people have faith in each other, trust becomes a more valuable resource in creating a civic community.

Contextual trust shows just the opposite pattern. In the more trusting environment of the 1960s, the goodwill of the Lake Wobegon effect went further than it did in the 1990s, when there was less trust in others to go around. In 1964, contextual trust in people boosted turnout by 18 percent. Its significance level was second only to interest in the campaign. By 1992, the significance level was less than half its 1964 rate, and the effect dropped by almost two-thirds. Now people living in the most trusting region were only 6 percent more likely to vote than those in the least trusting section. By the 1990s, social capital was not abundant enough to become contagious.

This same logic is likely to apply to other types of participation that depend more on social capital. Joining voluntary associations follows a similar path: Individual trust matters more when there is less social capital, while contextual trust counts more when people have greater faith in each other.¹² As we have both argued, then, the aggregate trends in trust in other people do more than track declining participation. They explain participation at the individual level as well.

A slippery slope or a seesaw?

Wait a minute. Are we explaining something that didn't happen? Are we making too much of Sherlock Holmes' dog that didn't bark. Perhaps there was no dog. Some observers look at the evidence differently. They argue that there has been no overall decline in many types of public participation, especially membership in voluntary associations. If Tocqueville came back to the contemporary United States, he would see a civic vitality that rivaled that of the early nineteenth century (Greeley 1996; Lemann

¹¹ Trust even had the wrong sign in 1964!

¹² I reported these results in an earlier version of "Faith, Hope, and Charity."

1996; Schudson 1996). Others see a more modest decline in interpersonal trust (Smith 1996). So we might be explaining something that didn't happen by something that barely happened.

First, trust. Smith (1996) notes that the General Social Survey question on trust was sometimes asked after questions about life satisfaction and sometimes asked after queries on crime, ideology, and divorce. The first series always yielded more trusters than the second, sometimes by a lot. In 1989, when the sample was split in two, the first group was almost 14 points more trusting than the second. Most other comparisons yield smaller differences, but the gaps are consistent and average about 8 percent.

Is the decline in trust ephemeral? Have Americans really lost social capital? Or have we all been duped by question-order effects? No. And Smith makes no such claim. Perhaps the fall is smaller than we believed, but it is still real. In *each* question ordering, we see a decline. For the first series, trust fell from 46.8 percent in 1973 to 36.6 percent in 1994. For the second, the decay was less precipitous. We started lower – at 39.7 percent in 1975 – and ended lower at 32.0 percent in 1994. Whatever the question ordering, there was a noticeable and significant decline in trust over time. Moreover, by the end of the time series, the question-order effect seemed to be wearing off. By 1993 (when the difference is 6.1 percent) and 1994 (when the difference is 4.6 percent), we see a convergence in responses regardless of the context.

Now to the dog. It may not bite, but it does bark. First, there is incontrovertible evidence that many types of participation have fallen sharply, as we have already noted. Second, even if membership in voluntary organizations has not plummeted (cf. Helliwell and Putnam 1996), it should have increased sharply. The single best predictor of both social trust and virtually every type of participation is education. As Brody (1978) has argued, there is a puzzle of participation in America: Turnout has declined, but it should have increased because Americans are better educated today than at any point in our history. The story is the same for membership in voluntary organizations.

We see an overall decline in membership in voluntary associations in the General Social Survey data of approximately 3 percent. This is hardly worth the *cri de coeur* of the social-capital movement. But if education has been increasing, membership in voluntary associations should have *increased*. We can estimate the direct and indirect effects of the increases in education on membership in voluntary associations in the two decades since the first General Social Survey in 1972. The direct effect focuses on how increases in education, especially college education, should have led more people to join voluntary associations. The indirect effect examines how education gains should have produced greater interpersonal

trust, which in turn shapes membership in voluntary organizations.¹³ The increase in education alone from 1972 to 1994 should have produced an average of 0.227 more memberships. The indirect effect – what we would expect if trust had risen with education levels – is an additional 0.065 membership. So the total effect is 0.293 memberships. This may not seem very large absolutely. But relatively it is quite powerful. From 1972 to 1994, the average American belonged to 1.849 organizations. The projected increase is 15.8 percent of the base. If we add these 0.293 memberships to the 1994 average of 1.862, we get 2.155 memberships. So in an era of rising education, voluntary organizations should have had 12.1 percent more members in 1994 than in 1972. The real 3 percent decline and the 12 percent increase that should have happened (the dog that didn't bark) point to a total decline of 15 percent, as Putnam (1995b) originally estimated without controls for education.

Civic action in a “mean world”

Trust, the core component of social capital, plays an important role in all sorts of civic activism and moral behavior. Civic participation – whether voting, membership in voluntary associations, giving to charity, or volunteering time – has fallen (either absolutely or relative to education) in the past two and a half decades. So has interpersonal trust (as well as other measures of social capital; see Putnam 1995a). We can link at least a moderate portion of Americans' withdrawal from civic life to our loss of social capital.¹⁴

But why have civic participation and trust ebbed? There is a host of contending forces, and we have provided strong evidence to eliminate most of the contenders. Putnam (1995a) exonerates a range of potential culprits for the decline in civic engagement. More women have joined the work force, placing a time crunch on participation, but both male and female participation fell before so many women began working. Increased mobility might account for weaker social bonds, but residential stability and homeownership have *risen* modestly since 1965, and they surely are higher now than during the 1950s, when civic engagement and social connectedness by our measures was definitely higher. Additional changes have transformed the American family since the 1960s: fewer marriages, more divorces, fewer children, and so on. Each of these changes

¹³ These calculations use estimates from a probit equation predicting trust and the second stage of a simultaneous equation regression estimation for membership in voluntary associations. Both are reported in Uslaner (1998b).

¹⁴ Even when the individual-level effects of trust are modest, contextual trust often has more powerful effects (Uslaner 1996, 1998b).

might account for some of the slackening of civic engagement, since married parents are generally more socially involved than other people. Another prominent alternative is that we are just too pressed for time in the 1990s (Schor 1991). Both Putnam (1995a) and Uslaner (1996a) show that time pressures don't keep Americans at home. Many of these potential explanations may play a role in shaping trust, but none is the likely root of the problem.

Putnam sees television as the culprit in the decline for both participation and trust. I argue below that we don't trust others as much anymore because we have lost confidence that the future will be better than the past. These are more than two alternative theses. They represent distinct arguments on how social capital works. For Putnam, the causal logic goes like this: People who watch a lot of television have less time to get involved in their communities. They also get a distorted view of the world. Television thus eats up time we would ordinarily spend in our communities; it also makes us less trusting of our fellow citizens and thus less likely to take an active role in working with them. My thesis is that trust reflects a worldview that is shaped in part by experience and in part by deeper values.

Putnam's argument for television goes like this. The single biggest change in the way Americans use their time since the 1960s has been the increase of television viewing (Robinson and Converse 1972). Simultaneously, we have withdrawn from many other forms of social activity. The connection is clear: People who watch a lot of television have neither the time nor the zeal to do much else. We sit home in front of our television sets instead of participating in our communities. And what we see on TV makes us shallow (Meyrowitz 1985).

TV viewing is the great exception to what we might call the participatory syndrome: One type of leisure activity leads to others. People who go camping visit art museums and tend their gardens. Attending sports events or playing sports, making art, going to auto races, camping, gardening, dancing, attending concerts, performing music, hunting and fishing, seeing movies, and using videocassette recorders all go together, in addition to camping and seeing art.¹⁵ But watching television is distinctive. Viewing TV either has no significant relationship to other activities or actually discourages participation.

Television dramas bring us violence and bad guys. The news highlights crime, war, disease, and other plagues. A viewer might reasonably

¹⁵ The list comes from the 1993 General Social Survey. There are some negligible relationships and a few negative ones: People who visit art museums are less likely to go to auto races. Hunters and fishermen don't dance as much or go to concerts. But most of the relationships are fairly strong.

think that the real world is cruel as well. Your local community might not be like Bosnia, but it is not Mr. Rogers' neighborhood either. Seventy percent of prime-time programs in 1978 contained violence; more than 90 percent of children's weekend morning programs did as well (Gerbner et al. 1980: 13). If you watch a lot of television, you are likely to believe that the "television world" *is* the real world.

There are clear trends in television viewing and trust in people, and they overlap strikingly. Television became a key part of American life in the 1950s. People born in the 1940s grew up with television, the first generation to become glued to the box. They and succeeding generations watched large amounts of television, particularly as children. They also became much less likely to read newspapers. Far more than pre-television generations, they got a distorted vision of the world, the "mean world." The generations raised on television – and especially the people who watch the most television and read newspapers least often – became the new misanthropes. They are less trusting and join fewer voluntary organizations (Putnam 1995b).

But the TV account does not stand up to a more elaborate statistical analysis. Allowing reciprocal effects among the variables and bringing in what I consider the key reason why trust has declined (optimism for the future), I find no effects for viewing either on trust or on membership in voluntary associations. And these results do not reflect poor measurement of viewing habits. Virtually no type of programming demobilizes people. Some types of programming – news and public broadcasting – led people to become *more* engaged.

The one show with consistent effects that persist despite controls is "Dr. Quinn, Medicine Woman." "Dr. Quinn" isn't a shoot-'em-up drama that makes people think that the real world must also be "mean." It is a heart-wrenching drama about a woman doctor in the "old West" that airs during television's "family hour" when violence is prohibited by federal regulation. The program appeals to people who attend services regularly and born-again Christians, although these variables (and others) don't wipe out the effects of the show. Perhaps people who stay home on Saturday nights to watch the show are less likely to get out and about through group memberships. If "Saturday night is the loneliest night of the week" for regular viewers, this might solve the puzzle (Uslaner 1996b).¹⁶

Even if television isn't the answer, it may be part of the question. Television viewers are dropouts from civic life. They opt out because they want to be alone. Heavy viewers say that they are frequently bored, don't

¹⁶ The estimation procedures are two-stage and three-stage least squares.

see things going their way, and don't want friends around when they are relaxing. If they had extra free time, they wouldn't spend it helping others or improving their intellects. They probably would devote it to more television. If we took away their television sets, they still would be bored and pessimistic.

Trust and optimism

A waning optimism for the future, not television, is the reason for the decline in trust (Uslaner 1998b). Optimism is a world view, not just a summation of life experiences. Optimists believe that other people will be helpful, are tolerant of people from different backgrounds, and value both diversity and independent thinking; they have confidence in their own capacity to shape the world (Rosenberg 1956; Lane 1959: 163–66). Optimists are not worried that others will exploit them. If they take a chance and lose, their upbeat world view leads them to try again. Setbacks are temporary; the next encounter will be more cooperative (Seligman 1991: 4–5). So it makes sense to trust others (Rosenberg 1956). Optimism and pessimism are not primarily reflections of how well you fare now. They reflect your expectations for the long run, especially for whether life will be better for the next generation. The American dream stresses that tomorrow will be better than today. Optimists believe in it; pessimists don't. And our fundamental optimism and pessimism is set early in our lives. It reflects our values at least as much as our experiences.¹⁷

Experience matters for trust. How well things are going for you shapes your world view (cf. Hardin 1992). But so do values and family structure (cf. Brehm and Rahn 1997). Trust depends to a large degree on altruism (Mansbridge, chapter 10, this volume; Wuthnow 1997), and this calls forth moral sentiments that may be only weakly related to immediate experience (Uslaner *in press*).

Optimism leads to generalized trust, which promotes civic activism, which creates a prosperous community, leading to increasing optimism. Pessimistic people trust only their own kind. They withdraw from participation in the larger society, and they never get the benefits of risk-taking. They don't prosper, and their pessimism becomes ever deeper-seated. Optimism stands at the beginning and end of the causal chain. For Putnam, it is only the end product.

¹⁷ Coleman's original discussion of social capital cites Glen Loury's usage. Loury formulated social capital as "the set of resources that inhere in family relations and in community social organizations and that are useful for the cognitive or social development of a child" (Coleman 1990: 300).

Optimism and trust are strongly related, but they are not the same thing. It makes little sense to trust others if you are a pessimist (though there are always some people who fit this category). But you *may* be an optimistic distruster, believing that tomorrow might be better than today for *you* because you control your own fate. Though you may not trust others to engage in cooperative behavior, you still may be an optimist. And, across several surveys, there is evidence that (1) there are considerable numbers of optimistic distrusters (but relatively few pessimistic trusters); and (2) optimistic distrusters believe, as do optimistic trusters, that they control their own fate.¹⁸ If the two concepts were simply measuring the same underlying concept, we shouldn't see distrusters who believe that they are masters of their own future (which they expect to be bright).

While optimism and trust are not the same thing, a positive world view lays the foundation for interpersonal trust. When people believe that things are getting better and that they can control their environment, they are likely to adopt cooperative values. When the future looks bright, you can afford to take the gamble that others will be trustworthy. If you are wrong, you will lose a bit, but you can afford it. When things look bleak, you will be more skeptical of others' motivations. There is no guarantee that the future will be better than the past, and each stranger is a competitor for scarce resources. Unconditional trust is foolhardy. Even conditional trust is risky.

So people who have less have a greater incentive to look out for themselves rather than contribute to collective goods – except when things look bright for the future and taking a risk does not seem like such a long shot. But when things look bleak, as in periods of increasing income inequality that have marked contemporary America, trust makes less sense for the downtrodden. First, their proportionate risk is far greater than mine. Second, when the rich get richer and the poor don't get richer, the less well-off may well feel exploited – and not quite so charitable (or trusting) to those who benefit at their expense. During the Great Depression, when most people were suffering, giving others the benefit of the doubt

¹⁸ I found support for this perspective in three surveys: the 1972 American National Election Study, the 1978 Quality of Life Survey, and a 1971 Survey Research Center Pilot Study of Economic Incentives, Values, and Subjective Well-Being in Baltimore and Detroit. In each survey, I created a combined measure of optimism and trust by cross-tabulating interpersonal trust with a dichotomous measure of expectations for the longer-term future (at least five years in the future). For each survey, pessimistic trusters were by far the smallest category among the fourfold classification. Optimistic distrusters strongly resembled optimistic trusters in their overall level of efficacy and belief that they could control their own destiny, while pessimistic trusters had less of a sense of mastery of their own fate. If trust and optimism were the same concept, I should not find this distinction.

was too risky for many. So stores hung out the sign “In God we trust, all others pay cash.”

There has been a sharp overall decline in confidence for the future. But for most of our history the belief that tomorrow would be better than today has been paramount. In public opinion polls from the late 1930s to the 1960s, Americans expressed optimism that life would get better. We believed that our children would have a better life than we did. This creed is essential to American culture; it was the promise that guided immigrants to come to a land where streets were paved with gold. By the late 1970s, we had turned sour. Not even during Ronald Reagan’s tenure did a majority believe that the next generation would fare better (Uslaner 1993: 76). By 1995, only 10 percent of Americans were “very confident” that life for their children would be better than it has been for them, while 54 percent were “not confident at all” (Kaiser Family Foundation 1996: 22).

Trust and optimism for the future reinforce each other, though the path from optimism to trust is stronger than the other way around. I use four measures of optimism and find that they are powerful determinants of social capital: A person who says that it is still all right to bring a child into the world, who says that the average person is faring better than in the past, who has faith that officials are listening, and who has a lot of confidence in science is 45 percent more likely to be trusting than a pessimist with the opposite attitudes. No other variable comes close to the combined effects of four types of optimism. In contrast, someone who watches 10 hours of television a day is only 4 percent less likely to be a truster than someone who never watches television. Television doesn’t produce a “mean world” effect: Someone who watches 10 hours a day is only 4 percent more likely to be a pessimist than a person who doesn’t see TV at all.

Social capital and democracy

Some years ago the noted novelist E. M. Forster (1965: 70) gave “Two Cheers for Democracy”: “one because it admits variety and two because it permits criticism. Two cheers are quite enough: there is no occasion to give three. Only Love the Beloved Republic deserves that.” Perhaps there is a reason for the third cheer. Democratic societies are trusting societies.

The benefits of trust and other forms of social capital are not unconditional. They depend upon a society’s environment. We hear much about how developing nations accumulate social capital through rotating credit associations and the like. But credit associations are small-scale attempts to build up trust in a world that could use a good shot in the arm of more

social capital. In the grander scheme of things, local efforts to build social capital pale by comparison to the larger political environment. Whatever the current crisis in industrialized societies, including the United States, democracies still outshine autocracies and other despotisms on the social capital ledger. Democracies are more trusting¹⁹ – and trusting countries have a larger share of their citizens joining voluntary associations (Putnam 1995a; Inglehart, chapter 4, this volume).

Only in democracies is trust a rational gamble. When the heavy hand of the state looms over society, it makes little sense to put too much faith in most other people (Levi 1996). A totalitarian state will demand that its citizens conform to rigid rules and will turn one person against another in that quest. Your neighbor may be an agent of the state, so you won't invest heavily in social trust. Even less repressive autocracies have little desire to foster alternative centers of power that we might find in civil societies. In totalitarian societies, it makes little sense to trust anyone but your family and your closest friends. In authoritarian societies, you might trust a somewhat larger circle. But only in democracies – and not even in all of them – will you give your trust to strangers.

Trust works because, like Forster's democracy, it promotes variety and admits criticism. It makes us more comfortable with strangers and more willing to put our trust where we might otherwise not tread. Democracies are breeding grounds for generalized trust and social networks.

Why? Levi (1996) and Muller and Seligson (1994) argue that living in a democracy makes you more trusting. And that seems right. But Inglehart (1988) maintains that a trusting political culture is more conducive to democracy. And that seems right, too. We know that trusting people are more tolerant and acceptant of minority cultures (Uslaner 1994).

The relationship between democracy and social capital appears to be symbiotic. This seems like a chicken-and-egg problem that defies causal ordering.²⁰ But Inglehart (chapter 4, this volume) presents data (and an argument) that help us sort things out: Democracies can't produce trust, but autocracies will destroy it. So the causal logic seems to look like this: Democracy doesn't depend on trust. In fact, democracy, as Mueller

¹⁹ Using aggregated data from the 1990 World Values Studies, supplemented by Latin American data from Muller and Seligson (1994), there is a 0.586 correlation between social trust and the measure of democracy (in 1978) in Ted Robert Gurr's POLITY III data set. I am grateful to Ronald Inglehart for the aggregate World Values Studies scores and to Ted Robert Gurr for the democracy measure.

²⁰ Muller and Seligson (1994) show that the number of years of continuous democracy from 1900 to 1986 has a more powerful effect on an index of civic culture (including trust) from 1981 to 1986 than the culture index has on the democracy index. But our analysis of the Gurr data set (see note 1) shows no significant effects for trust on change in democracy or for change in democracy on trust. The problem is that we have no measurement of trust (especially for many nations) before the 1980s.

(1996:117–18, italics in original) argues, doesn't seem to depend on much of anything: “. . . democracy is at base a fairly simple thing – even a rather natural one. If people feel something is wrong, they will complain about it. . . . People do not need to be encouraged or coaxed; nor do they first need to be imbued with the democratic spirit or achieve broad literacy or a high degree of development. They will just *do* it.”

Constitutional engineers may come in with their democracy machines and change legal structures overnight. They may proclaim their task done and remark how easy it is to produce electoral systems with many (sometimes too many) political parties and a free press. Yet we are still left with cultures of distrust.²¹ This logic would produce precisely the pattern that Inglehart observes: Both high and low levels of trust can coexist with democratic governments, but authoritarian states need to destroy civil society to maintain control. The mean level of trust in 1990 among societies that were democratic in 1978 is 0.402. The standard deviation is 0.128. For non-democratic societies, the mean is 0.281 and the standard deviation is 0.097 (see note 19 for the data sources). Democratic societies are all over the lot: In some, barely a quarter of people trusted each other, and in others 60 percent had faith in their fellow citizens.²² In non-democracies, the range is much narrower: Between 17 and 39 percent of the public are trusters. Yet, you don't need a legacy of trust to become a democracy. By the mid-1990s, virtually every country in this database had become a democracy.²³ Brazil, where less than 10 percent of the people trust each other, and Norway and Sweden, with more than 60 percent trusters, look alike when we tote up the legal ledger.

Can democracy create trust? Inglehart's data, though very limited in time (most new democracies are simply too new), offer little hope that courts of law and a free press are sufficient to (as Israeli hawks say in a different, less trusting, context) “create facts on the ground.” Under the best of circumstances, good law enforcement can create compliance. It can't produce trust – certainly not trust based on altruism (Mansbridge, chapter 10, this volume). Most people obey the law because they believe the legal system is fair, not because they fear punishment (Tyler 1990).

²¹ Mueller's discussion stems from the experience of the former Communist states in Eastern and Central Europe. Yet Inglehart (chapter 4, this volume) shows that these countries have among the least trusting populations. Ironically, Mueller's solution to the problem of civil society is not structural, but the adoption of the norms of honesty that undergird vibrant capitalist states (Mueller 1996: 133). Without a deeply rooted sense of trust, it is difficult to see how these norms will take root in nations with patterns of pessimism fostered by authoritarianism.

²² This eliminates extremes, taking out the top and bottom 10 percent of cases. I also exclude China, which has a high level of trust, from these calculations.

²³ This is not surprising, since it is easier to conduct survey research in democracies.

Courts can save us from rascals only if there are few rascals. Law-abiding citizens, not rogue outlaws, create constitutions that work. The “honor among thieves” is very limited. And it is easy to see why. Rational agents have no reason to trust institutions. They have every reason to base whatever faith they have on the people who run the structures (Offe, chapter 3, this volume).

Democracy is no guarantee of either trust or a vibrant community. Democracies that are badly divided by ethnic, religious, or racial clashes may be only marginally more trusting than autocracies that are similarly split. Generalized trust can be the engine of a society only where most people are willing to express at least a modicum of faith in strangers. And people are most likely to trust others (and not just their own kind) when they are doing well and expect to do better. If even small losses are very costly, trusting others may be too big a risk (Offe, chapter 3, this volume). A poor person would feel the loss of a cooler far more than I did. Patterson (chapter 6, this volume) shows that people who are less well-off and who have been treated badly by American society (especially blacks) are far less trusting than others.²⁴ And societies that fare well economically are more trusting (Inglehart, chapter 4, this volume). Prosperity makes people optimistic and optimism breeds trust. Yet, we don't always need prosperity to produce optimism or trust. Things can be *getting better* and people can have a sense that they *can make things better*. This is what optimism is all about, and it can occur even if prosperity seems just around the corner.

In one sense, democracy is all about optimism: the belief that people can make a difference and change the direction of the country when things go awry. In the United States, trust in others increases in presidential election years, perhaps because people look to these contests as opportunities for civic renewal (Rahn, Brehm, and Carlson 1997). Yet, the relationship between democracy and trust is not a simple equation where democracy leads to feelings of optimism and control and then to trust. Democracy can produce a sense of optimism only if people believe that they have a real chance to effect change. In some democracies, there is little opportunity for alternation of parties in power and in others people may not believe that it makes a great deal of difference whether one side or the other wins.

To have a democracy does not mean that you have a well-functioning government. Societies that are badly polarized by class or ethnic divisions

²⁴ In multivariate analysis, the impact of family income on trust is moderate, tempered by education and confidence in the future. But income is one of the strongest determinants of faith in the future, so it has both direct and strong indirect effects on trust (Uslaner 1996a.)

may have democratic constitutions, but they won't work well as democracies. Putnam (1993) got it right when he said that trust *makes democracy work* in northern Italy. It doesn't simply *make democracy*. Generalized trust, for those who can afford the risk, undergirds the attitudes that produce cooperation and prosperity. Particularized trust often seems to be the most rational strategy for those who see the risks of putting too much faith in strangers. But it is ultimately a self-defeating strategy, as Montegransans and Bosnians find out, though one that is tough to extract yourself from. A new constitution, even with all the trappings of democracy, can't turn a low-trusting society into a wealthy one.²⁵

Even if democracies don't necessarily produce trusting societies, authoritarian states destroy faith in others. Citizens may or may not exercise much control in democracies, but they have little reason to believe they can control their world at all in *any* authoritarian system. Dictatorships often demand that people inform on each other and even family relationships are not always secure. So you can't take an authoritarian regime, have a small elite succeed in toppling it, and then expect it to work well as a new democracy with a strong foundation of interpersonal trust. There will still be the soft underbelly of pessimism – and, as we see in many new democracies, relatively little respect for the new legal codes guaranteeing civil liberties and other desirable things.

We can create new constitutional formats, but it is not so easy to develop trusting societies. We know little about engineering optimism and that means we don't know much about developing trust and civic engagement over the long haul. But maybe we can take some small steps.

Can we restore social capital?

While I disagree with some of the recent literature on what drives trust and in particular on the causal ordering leading to trust, I agree with Putnam and others that social capital has declined, that participation in civic life also has fallen, that both trends are disturbing, and that they are strongly connected to each other.

What, then, is to be done? Get people involved. So says Putnam (1995a), who argues that participation in civic life can build the trust that leads to further participation. Involved in what? You can't tell people

²⁵ The causal ordering isn't clear, but there are two interesting cross-national correlations using the Gurr democracy measure (see note 2) and the aggregate World Values Study measure of trust. For 42 nations, the correlation between GNP per capita and trust is considerably higher (0.771) than the correlation between GNP per capita and democracy (0.586, cf. note 1).

that they ought to feel shame for not fulfilling their civic duties. That's why they opted out in the first place.

But the right strategy can build a sense of control, which leads to a sense of optimism for the future and replaces particularized trust with general trust in others. This scheme involves a bit of deception. Don't tell people that they need to get their social capital act together. Instead, get them involved in something that seems to have little to do with molding better citizens. Get them to do something they like that has a common purpose that will unite people, rather than set them at each other's throats.

This is the strategy that Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues employed in social experiments (Sherif et al. 1961). They induced deep hostility (particularized trust) among two groups of summer campers. And then they sought to put Humpty Dumpty together again. It wasn't easy. Sherif and his colleagues found the solution through what they call "superordinate tasks." The two groups of campers had to come together to get themselves out of a collective fix. The camp made them ride in same truck on a field trip. When the truck broke down, the two groups were compelled to cooperate to help get it moving. They also found themselves "forced" to cooperate to remove boulders that were blocking the camp's water supply.

The campers did not see these "superordinate tasks" as exercises in building social capital. Instead, they were exigencies of the moment – that just happened to build trust among formerly warring groups. Social capital emerged as a by-product of digging oneself out of a ditch. Rescuing the truck built common interests and a sense of control and ultimately fostered generalized trust among all the campers.

We don't have many opportunities to dig ourselves out of ditches in everyday life. And when we do, there are plenty of opportunities for people low in social capital to opt out. So how do we build trust? Perhaps, as Putnam wryly suggested, by bowling in leagues. People who play sports or who attend sporting events are more trusting. They are also, both directly and indirectly (through increased trust), more likely to join voluntary associations.²⁶

Professor Harold Hill sought four decades ago to stem the decline in morals in River City, Iowa, by starting a boys band. He should have started a Little League. No other leisure activity (see the list cited above in the discussion of television) creates interpersonal trust or membership in voluntary organizations in multivariate models. This makes sense. My causal logic goes from values and optimism to trust to membership in

²⁶ These findings stem from a simultaneous equation analysis by Uslaner from the 1987 General Social Survey.

voluntary organizations – and not the other way around (in contrast to Putnam 1993, 1995a; and Brehm and Rahn 1997). As Levi (1996) argues, it is arguable whether choral societies or other voluntary associations should produce more social capital (trust). If you put a bunch of misanthropes in a room and have them sing, they will still be Scrooges (and they may sound sour notes). The linkage between voluntary associations and trust is likely the other way around: Trusting people show up in choral societies (and other organizations), and there is substantial evidence for this (Uslaner 1998b). Contra Frost, good neighbors make good fences. A fence (or any other institution) cannot build trust (Offe, this volume).

Yet, sports are different. Sports build social capital because they build self-confidence and teach respect for rules. Student athletes – at least at Ivy League institutions – have wider social networks that permit them to “work toward common goals” (Cantor and Prentice 1996: 5). And sports, like another major determinant of trust (education), impart values. People of all backgrounds meet on the playing fields, helping to build the tolerance that is essential for generalized trust.²⁷ Egalitarian attitudes help create – and may be necessary for – sustained social trust (Putnam 1993: 174; Uslaner 1996). Sports also teach teamwork and respect for rules.

Other leisure activities also teach values. Visiting art museums promotes respect for beauty and the intellect; it is highly correlated with both trust and membership in voluntary associations. But its effects are limited. Visiting art museums has no independent effect on either trust or joining associations once we take education levels into account. When we go to art museums, we see people very much like ourselves. Playing sports widens our horizons in ways that few other leisure activities can. Sports widen our social contact. They spread tolerance and egalitarian values on the sly. People don’t play games to make themselves more moral. Morality lessons are a by-product, not the main event, in athletics.

Even people who doubt our state of malaise point to sports. Lemann (1996: 25) notes that US Youth Soccer now has 2.4 million members, twice as many as a decade ago and almost 200 times as many as twenty years ago. But not everything is soccer. Greeley (1996) finds membership in sports groups flat over the more than twenty years of the General Social Survey.

²⁷ US House Speaker Newt Gingrich (R-GA) noted that 1996 Republican vice presidential candidate and former National Football League quarterback Jack Kemp has showered with more blacks than most Republicans have ever met. We have no direct source for this quote, but Mark Shields, a commentator on PBS and CNN, tells the story regularly on the air.

We must recognize that sports can hardly be a cure-all. We offer three notes of caution. First, sports can be competitive – and cutthroat. El Salvador and Nicaragua fought a war in 1969, ignited by a soccer match. Sherif and his colleagues (1961: 111–12) found that competition between hostile teams only exacerbated bad feelings. And playing sports has costs for student athletes, too. They are *less likely* than other students to take part in other extracurricular activities (Cantor and Prentice 1996: 14). For sports to be an effective conveyer of social capital, they must be a pastime. When they become the source of your identity, you retreat into your world of particularized trust. And sports may consume you so that you can't expand your horizons.

Second, we might be confusing the causal direction with trust. Perhaps more trusting people might be more likely to get involved in sports, especially team sports, in the first place. Then we still would face the problem of how we can make people more trusting. I prefer to be agnostic about the direction of causality now, but I cannot rule out the possibility that these results may be ephemeral. We need longitudinal data (that don't seem to exist now) on whether playing sports may increase participation and social trust, especially among the most impressionable: the young. If sports are more than just another place to meet people – if they really do teach values such as fair play and teamwork – perhaps something as simple as (dare we say) midnight basketball (or, even better, baseball in the daylight) might be an effective moral teacher.

Finally, it would be both remarkable and disturbing if something as simple as playing sports – or, even more unlikely, attending sporting events – is the solution to something as profound as declining participation and trust. Social capital is primarily a moral resource. If our declining social capital reflects a moral crisis, the most we can expect from rounding up both young and old into sports leagues is a jump start in restoring trust in others. It can't provide the bolt of electricity that we need to recharge our spirits. The big answer to how we can restore our declining social capital will lie elsewhere, if anywhere.

In the meantime, it might be worthwhile to start small. Perhaps more people playing sports with others – bowling together – might lead to modest increases in trust and to more people participating in other desirable activities. When I look around at my son's soccer meets, I see few coolers that seem to be stolen (or am I too optimistic?).

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