

In ESSENCE

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SOCIETY

The Downside of Diversity

THE SOURCES: “*E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-First Century*” by Robert D. Putnam, in *Scandinavian Political Studies*, June 2007, and “Bowling With Others” by James Q. Wilson, in *Commentary*, Oct. 2007.

FEW CONCEPTS ARE MORE celebrated in modern America than racial and ethnic diversity. Yet casual talk-show racism and fierce hostility toward the current wave of Hispanic immigrants make the glorification of “difference” seem glaringly out of step with reality. Although it is alluring to think that living in diverse communities fosters tolerance and social solidarity, Harvard sociologist Robert D. Putnam, author of the influential book *Bowling Alone* (2000), which warned of Americans’ growing social isolation, says the evidence points overwhelmingly in the opposite direction. The more we are brought into physical proximity with people of another race or ethnic background, the more we with-

draw into our shells, he writes.

A complex statistical analysis of data collected in half-hour interviews with 30,000 Americans in 2000 found that people who live in heavily racially and ethnically mixed communities “distrust not merely people who do not look like them, but even people who *do*,” Putnam says.

Diversity triggers a tendency to hunker down and to have less confidence in local government, community leaders, and news media, the study data show. In homogeneous North and South Dakota, 70 to 80 percent of survey respondents said they trusted their neighbors a lot. In diverse Los Angeles and San Fran-

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cisco, only about 30 percent said the same thing.

Living in a diverse community without a lot of trust in the people next door makes residents less likely to register to vote and more likely to participate in protest marches, Putnam found. People are also less likely to give to charity or to volunteer in the community. Residents of racially or ethnically mixed areas have fewer close friends and confidantes, report being less happy, and say they have a lower quality of life. They spend more time watching television.

The effects are similar regardless of age, gender, economic status, political philosophy, or race. Living in a diverse community has a slightly greater negative impact on conservatives than on liberals, but the effect is “significant” among liberals too. Its impact on whites, Putnam says, is “definitely greater,” but it is “visible” among nonwhites as well.

In the long run, Americans can handle diversity, Putnam says. A century ago, new immigrants from Eastern Europe married only each other, as did migrants from Southern Europe. But by 1990, only one-fifth of white Americans had spouses with an identical ethnic background.

Putnam says the country should look to what worked in the past to

foster social solidarity, from building community centers and athletic fields that immigrants and natives can enjoy together to making English-language training more accessible. Because the long-run benefits of immigration and diversity are national in scope, the federal government should help local governments bear the short-term direct costs of increased expenditures on education, health care, and other needs.

But Putnam's former Harvard colleague James Q. Wilson, the well-known conservative thinker, dismisses his long-term solutions as "wishful thinking." It's almost impossible to forge social cohesion among diverse groups, Wilson says. The few institutions that have succeeded, such as the U.S. military and some churches, possess two key ingredients that neighborhoods lack: authoritative leaders and discipline.

More important, Wilson argues, Putnam has a cramped understanding of solidarity. His ideas draw on rights-based notions about how we must learn to manage relations with others and respect differences. That's only half the battle, according to Wilson. People get a sense of belonging from the things they *share* with others, such as an ethnic heritage or moral beliefs. If your neighborhood is populated with people whose values and beliefs are close to your own, you're naturally more likely to join in community life.

Putnam thinks that diversity can help create community. Wilson counters that it's a competing value, albeit a worthy one. "As when it comes to other arrangements in a democracy, balance is all."

SOCIETY

The Religious Shall Multiply

THE SOURCE: "Falling Human Fertility and the Future of the Family" by Philip Longman, in *The Family in America*, July 2007.

THERE'S HEAVY COMPETITION for the biggest threat of the 21st century, what with terrorism, global warming, and the proliferation of nuclear weapons. But all pale in comparison to the force that will most affect the future of society in the new millennium, according to Philip Longman, a fellow at the New America Foundation. That's the decline in birthrates.

Women are having fewer children in every hemisphere, in countries rich and poor, in families that are Catholic, Protestant, and Muslim, and under all forms of government. Even though the world's population is growing by about 76 million annually—that's the equivalent of pasting a new country the size of Egypt onto the globe every year—it's not because people are having more children. They're not. It's because everybody is living longer. "The absolute number of children aged 0 to 4 is actually six million lower today [worldwide] than it was in 1990," Longman says.

Over the long term, the average woman needs to bear 2.1 children for the population to remain constant. Mothers need to replace themselves and their partners, and provide an extra tenth of a child to make up for the individuals who never reproduce. But there are fewer and fewer places with fertility rates above the replace-

ment level. China, Iran, Turkey, Russia, Ukraine, Poland, Kazakhstan? All below 2.1. And among the major industrialized countries, only the United States comes close to a population-sustaining birthrate. Even India, with an overall fertility rate of 2.5, is finding that births in its southern states have fallen below the rate necessary to maintain current population levels.

In developed countries the trend toward having only one child is driven by "sheer economics," Longman says. In many cases, fertility rates peak in the school-age years. The cost of raising a middle-class child has risen, according to U.S. government estimates, to more than \$200,000, not including college tuition. Urbanization also drives down fertility; and around the world more than 50 percent of married or cohabiting women are using modern contraception.

But there are larger cultural and religious issues at play, Longman writes. Scholars who have scrutinized polling data have found a strong correlation between "modern, individualistic, secular values" and low fertility rates. Do you distrust the army? If you do and you live in Europe, you are far less likely to marry and have children. Do you think the most important goal in education is to develop imagination and independence? There is little chance you'll have a large family.

Once the population is broken down in this fashion, it becomes clear that a relatively small segment of the nation is having a disproportionate share of the children. This segment is quite likely to be deeply religious, Longman says. Although religious