

EXCERPT

Ethnic Diversity's Downside

In 88 B.C. King Mithridates VI of Pontus invaded Roman territory in Asia Minor. He encouraged Asian debtors to kill their Roman creditors. Happy to reduce their credit card bills, the Asians massacred 80,000 Romans.

Ethnic conflict is a tragic constant of human history, still very much in the news today, from the Balkans to Central Africa to Indonesia to Nigeria. Ethnic conflict has a peaceful political dimension as well as the more publicized violent dimension. Recently, the economics literature has studied the effects of ethnic conflict on economic development.

Ethnolinguistic fractionalization in the cross-country sample adversely affects income, growth, and economic policies, which is one explanation for Africa's poor growth performance. More ethnically diverse cities and counties in the United States spend less on public goods. States with more religious-ethnic heterogeneity show lower public support for higher education and lower high school graduation rates. In Kenya, there is less funding for primary schools in more ethnically diverse districts. Ethnic diversity also predicts poor quality of government services. Linguistic or religious diversity leads to greater political instability, which in turn leads to higher government consumption. In U.S. cities, there is a link from ethnic diversity to bloated government payrolls. Ethnically polarized nations react more adversely to external terms of trade shocks. More foreign aid proceeds are diverted into corruption in more ethnically diverse places. Ethnic homogeneity raises social capital, or trust, which in turn is associated with faster growth and higher output per worker. The finding that ethnic heterogeneity lowers trust is confirmed with both U.S. data and cross-country data. In the United States, greater ethnic heterogeneity makes participation in social clubs less likely, which is consistent with the idea that there is not much association across groups. Several decades ago, scholars noted that "cultural and ethnic heterogeneity tends to hamper the early stages of nation-building and growth."

—William Easterly, a World Bank economist, in *Economic Development and Cultural Change* (July 2001)

A Verdict on School Choice

"What Research Can Tell Policymakers about School Choice" by Paul Teske and Mark Schneider, in *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management* (Fall 2001), John Wiley & Sons, 605 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10158.

School choice has been around in one form or another for several decades, and while Teske and Schneider do chant the old academic mantra, "more studies are needed," they say there's enough evidence now to point toward some conclusions about the effects of choice. Most of them are pretty positive.

The two political scientists at the State University of New York at Stony Brook surveyed more than a hundred studies of school-choice systems, ranging from

1960s-vintage magnet schools to charter schools and different voucher schemes now being tried out on a limited scale in Cleveland, Milwaukee, and other cities. Their clearest finding: Parents who are able to choose where to send their kids are much more satisfied with the schools than those who lack this option. They also tend to be more involved in their kids' schooling.

How do kids perform in choice systems? Answers vary. Charter schools represent

the nation's biggest experiment with choice, but it's too soon to judge results. The best studies of voucher programs—which generally allow parents the widest array of school choices to put their kids in any school, public or private—show “modest to moderate test score improvements for some, but not all, students who participate.” In New York City, programs that allow students to choose to attend certain public schools within their local school district appear to have helped lift test scores of *all* kids, including those who did not exercise choice. Perhaps, the authors speculate, the competition for students induced all the local schools to improve. Their bottom line: “While not all of these studies conclude that choice enhances performance, it is significant to note that the best ones do, and that [we] did not find *any* study that documents significantly lower performance in choice schools.”

What about concerns that students who enter private schools under voucher plans won't absorb democratic values? Studies show that “students in private schools, and

particularly students in Catholic schools, are either more tolerant of others and know more American civic values than others, or are statistically equal to public school students.”

The “most important question” about school choice is “stratification,” note Teske and Schneider. There's not much question that white, better-educated, and more affluent parents are better informed about school choices than other parents and are more likely to take advantage of chances to improve their child's schooling. Some systems seem to promote more racial and economic separation than others: Magnet schools perform poorly in this respect, while charter schools tend to better reflect the makeup of the general population. The authors say aggressive outreach efforts aimed at poor and minority families might mitigate the problem. They also wonder if the stratification seen in some school choice systems is significantly worse than what occurs in more conventional systems. To answer such questions, of course, more studies are needed.

PRESS & MEDIA

Covering the War

A Survey of Recent Articles

It's too early for anyone to assess the news media's coverage of the war on terrorism—that will likely take as long as the assessment of the conduct of the war itself. Professional criticism of print and TV coverage in the war's early days has been spotty. But the judgment from one quarter has been swift and severe: A November 16 Gallup poll (www.gallup.com) shows that only 43 percent of the public approves of the news media's handling of the war on terrorism. No other institution—including the Postal Service—had less than a 60 percent approval rating in the poll.

What have reporters and editors done to deserve such obloquy? They certainly haven't rocked the boat, according to John R. MacArthur, publisher of *Harper's* and author of *Second Front: Censorship and Propaganda in the Gulf War* (1992). Writing in the *Nation* (Nov. 19, 2001), he divides his scorn between the

Bush administration, which made it “next to impossible” for reporters to get near the combat in Afghanistan, and the “supine” press. “Evidently afflicted with a guilt complex after Vietnam, the owners of the major newspapers and networks long ago ceased to protest Pentagon manipulation, and now they feel justified by simple-minded polls that show reflexive support for ‘military security.’”

Almost from the day hijacked jets crashed into the Pentagon and the World Trade Center, most discussion of press coverage has focused on what it means for American reporters to be objective in such a conflict. The debate has had a series of defining moments: a teary Dan Rather's declaration that he stood ready to “line up” behind the commander in chief; Tom Brokaw's publicized decision not to wear an American flag lapel pin on TV; the offhand statement by ABC News president David