

What We Do Together:

The State of Associational Life in America

SCP REPORT NO. 1-17 | MAY 2017

social capital project

A project of the Joint Economic Committee – Republicans | Chairman, Sen. Mike Lee
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Today, Americans face a wide variety of challenges in our era of tumultuous transition. We are materially better off in many ways than in the past. But despite this real progress, there is a sense that our social fabric has seen better days. Leading thinkers have issued warnings that we are increasingly “bowling alone,” “coming apart,” and inhabiting a “fractured republic.” At the heart of those warnings is a view that what happens in the middle layers of our society is vital to sustaining a free, prosperous, democratic, and pluralistic country. That space is held together by extended networks of cooperation and social support, norms of reciprocity and mutual obligation, trust, and social cohesion. In short, it is sustained by *what we do together*.

The following report is the first product of the Social Capital Project—a multi-year research effort that will investigate the evolving nature, quality, and importance of our associational life. “Associational life” is our shorthand for the web of social relationships through which we pursue joint endeavors—namely, our families, our communities, our workplaces, and our religious congregations. These institutions are critical to forming our character and capacities, providing us with meaning and purpose, and for addressing the many challenges we face.

The goal of the project is to better understand why the health of our associational life feels so compromised, what consequences have followed from changes in the middle social layers of our society, why some communities have more robust civil society than others, and what can be done—or can stop being done—to improve the health of our social capital. Through a series of reports and hearings, it will study the state of the relationships that weave together the social fabric enabling our country—our laws, our institutions, our markets, and our democracy—to function so well in the first place.

This introductory report contains a broad overview of what we mean by “associational life,” discusses its importance, and provides an initial portrait of several long-term changes in the state of American associational life across the domains of family, religion, community, and work. Here are some key findings in each of those domains:

Family: Fewer living in families, no less time spent with our families, later marriage and childbearing, fewer children, more single parenthood

- Between 1975 and 2011, the share of three- and four-year-olds cared for by a parent during the day declined from 80 percent to somewhere between 24 and 48 percent. But parents are spending no less time with their children overall.
- Between 1973 and 2016, the percentage of Americans age 18-64 who lived with a relative declined from 92 percent to 79 percent. The decline was driven by a dramatic 21-point drop in the percentage who were living with a spouse, from 71 percent to 50 percent.
- In 1970, there were 76.5 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women aged 15 and older. As of 2015, that rate had declined by more than half to 32 per thousand.

- In 1970, 56 percent of American families included at least one child, but by 2016 just 42 percent did. The average family with children had 2.3 children in 1970 but just 1.9 in 2016. Among all families—with or without children—the average number of children per family has dropped from 1.3 to 0.8.
- Between 1970 and 2016, the share of children being raised by a single parent (or by neither parent) rose from 15 percent to 31 percent.
- Between 1970 and 2015, births to single mothers rose from 11 percent of all births to 40 percent.

Religion: Lower membership and attendance, fewer raised in a religious tradition, less confidence in organized religion

- In the early 1970s, nearly seven in ten adults in America were still members of a church or synagogue. While fewer Americans attended religious service regularly, 50 to 57 percent did so at least once per month. Today, just 55 percent of adults are members of a church or synagogue, while just 42 to 44 percent attend religious service at least monthly.
- In the early 1970s, 98 percent of adults had been raised in a religion, and just 5 percent reported no religious preference. Today, however, the share of adults who report having been raised in a religion is down to 91 percent, and 18 to 22 percent of adults report no religious preference.
- In 1973, two-thirds of adults had “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of confidence in “the church or organized religion,” and in another survey the same year, 36 percent reported “a great deal” of confidence in organized religion. By 2016, those numbers had fallen to 41 percent and 20 percent, respectively.

Community: Less time with neighbors, no less time with friends, less racial segregation, more class segregation, less trust generally and in institutions but no less trust in friends or local government, no less volunteering, less voting, mixed trends on political engagement

- Between 1974 and 2016, the percent of adults who said they spend a social evening with a neighbor at least several times a week fell from 30 percent to 19 percent.
- Between 1970 and the early 2010s, the share of families in large metropolitan areas who lived in middle-income neighborhoods declined from 65 percent to 40 percent. Over that same time period the share of families living in poor neighborhoods rose from 19 percent to 30 percent, and those living in affluent neighborhoods rose from 17 percent to 30 percent.
- Between 1972 and 2016, the share of adults who thought most people could be trusted declined from 46 percent to 31 percent. Between 1974 and 2016, the number of Americans expressing a great deal or fair amount of trust in the judgement of the American people “under our democratic system about the issues facing our country” fell from 83 percent to 56 percent.

- Between 1974 and 2015, the share of adults that did any volunteering who reported volunteering for at least 100 hours increased from 28 percent to 34 percent.
- Between 1972 and 2012, the share of the voting-age population that was registered to vote fell from 72 percent to 65 percent, and the trend was similar for the nonpresidential election years of 1974 and 2014. Correspondingly, between 1972 and 2012, voting rates fell from 63 percent to 57 percent (and fell from 1974 to 2014).
- Between 1972 and 2008, the share of people saying they follow “what’s going on in government and public affairs” declined from 36 percent to 26 percent.
- Between 1972 and 2012, the share of Americans who tried to persuade someone else to vote a particular way increased from 32 percent to 40 percent.

Work: Less time with coworkers off the job, little change in commuting time, more work among women, less work among men, more “alternative work arrangements,” part-time or part-year work no more common, longer job tenure, less union membership, more occupational licensing

- Between the mid-1970s and 2012, the average amount of time Americans between the ages of 25 and 54 spent with their coworkers outside the workplace fell from about two-and-a-half hours to just under one hour.
- The share of workers living and working in different counties was 26 percent in 1970 and 27 percent in the second half of the 2000s, and commuting time has risen only modestly since 1980.
- Between the mid-1970s and 2012, among 25- to 54-year-olds, time at work rose 4 percent. The story was very different for men and women though. Hours at work rose 27 percent among women. Among men, hours at work fell by 9 percent between the mid-1970s and 2012.
- Work has become rarer, in particular, among men with less education. From the mid-1970s to 2012, hours at work fell by just 2 percent among men with a college degree or an advanced degree, compared with 14 percent among those with no more than a high school education.
- Between 1995 and 2015, workers in “alternative work arrangements” (e.g., temp jobs, independent contracting, etc.) grew from 9 percent to 16 percent of the workforce.
- Since 2004, median job tenure has been higher than its 1973 level, indicating that workers are staying in their jobs *longer* than in the past.
- Between 1970 and 2015, union membership declined from about 27 percent to 11 percent of all wage and salary workers.

We conclude that rising affluence has made associational life less necessary for purposes of gaining material benefits, but that we have lost much by doing less together.

WHAT WE DO TOGETHER: THE STATE OF ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE IN AMERICA

In modern political thought, two terms have until recently tended to dominate discourse: the individual and the nation-state. This can hardly be surprising, since both these terms (and their underlying realities) are modern arrivals on the stage of history. But these two terms apply, as it were, only to the two extremes of social life, excluding the “thickest” parts of social living in between.¹

– Michael Novak

The quest for community will not be denied, for it springs from some of the powerful needs of human nature—needs for a clear sense of cultural purpose, membership, status, and continuity. Without these, no amount of mere material welfare will serve to arrest the developing sense of alienation in our society, and the mounting preoccupation with the imperatives of community.²

– Robert Nisbet

Americans are living through a period of transition to a post-industrial society based on knowledge and services, one that has wrought immense social changes.³ Past changes of similar scale—first from the long pre-agricultural past to rural farming life, followed by our tumultuous transition to an industrial economy—have been accompanied by social dislocation and subsequent adaptation.⁴ But today we are struggling to constructively orient our politics in a forward-looking way; instead, much of our politics and discourse is oriented around nostalgia for a time that is never returning.⁵

To be sure, much is going well in America. Relative to many other countries, we hold an enviable position. Having emerged from the Great Recession, the nation enjoys relatively low unemployment and incomes that, while growing too slowly, are as high as they have ever been across the board.⁶ Educational attainment continues to increase; a higher share of Americans than ever before have a college degree.⁷ Most workers enjoy longer retirements, and overall life expectancy is at an all-time high.⁸ The internet and advances in mobile communications technology have made possible unprecedented and inexpensive access to the world’s knowledge. By these standards, it has never been a better time to be alive in America.

And yet, despite this real progress, there is a disorienting sense that our social fabric is frayed. We are wealthier in material terms than ever before, but leading thinkers have issued warnings that we are increasingly “bowling alone,”⁹ “coming apart,”¹⁰ and inhabiting a “fractured republic.”¹¹ At the heart of those warnings, to one degree or another, is the view that what happens in the middle layers of our society—what we do together in the space between the individual and the state—is vital to sustaining a free, prosperous, democratic, and pluralistic country. It is in that space where we are formed, where we learn to solve problems together, where we learn the “art of association”—a space held together by extended networks of cooperation and social support, norms of reciprocity and mutual obligation, trust, and social cohesion. As Yuval Levin puts it, the middle layers

*begin in loving family attachments. They spread outward to interpersonal relationships in neighborhoods, schools, workplaces, religious communities, fraternal bodies, civic associations, economic enterprises, activist groups, and the work of local governments. They reach further outward toward broader social, political, and professional affiliations, state institutions, and regional affinities. And they conclude in a national identity that among its foremost attributes is dedicated to the principle of the equality of the entire human race.*¹²

While much is going well in America on a comparative and historical basis, our associational life today appears unhealthy in many ways. For example, between 1960 and 2015, the proportion of children under 18 living with only one or neither parent increased dramatically, from 12 percent to 31 percent.¹³ In 2015, over a third of parents—and half of fathers—said they spent too little time with their children.¹⁴ Work relationships, civic engagement, and religious communities have also been important elements of building and maintaining our social fabric. Yet, a steadily increasing share of prime-age males (ages 25 to 54) have dropped out of the labor force altogether.¹⁵ There have been uneven but decades-long declines in civic and community participation, especially of the face-to-face variety.¹⁶ Many measures of religious vitality have also slowly but steadily declined over the last several decades.¹⁷

We also appear to be losing faith in national institutions. The government, the press, and both organized labor and corporate leaders lack the confidence of the people, as reflected in several long-running surveys. For example, between 1958 and 2015, the Pew Research Center shows that public trust in the federal government fell from about 73 percent to about 19 percent.¹⁸ Gallup reports that Americans have very low confidence in many major institutions; less than 40 percent of respondents said they had a combined “great deal” or “quite a lot” of confidence in the medical system (39 percent), the presidency (36 percent), the U.S. Supreme Court (36 percent), the public schools (30 percent), banks (27 percent), organized labor (23 percent), the criminal justice system (23 percent), television news (21 percent), newspapers (20 percent), big business (18 percent), and Congress (6 percent). In most cases, current levels of confidence reflect a marked decline over the last several decades. These institutions that have so much influence over our lives appear sclerotic, unresponsive to modern needs, and opaque and inaccessible to many.

There are innumerable factors that have contributed to the challenges Americans face in this new era and to the anxiety stemming from the resistance of those challenges, thus far, to ready solutions. All are important, including the discrete economic issues Washington policymakers and pundits are most familiar with and therefore most comfortable discussing—taxes and spending, welfare, trade, employment, wages, and growth.

The Social Capital Project is a multi-year research project to investigate an equally important factor that is too often overlooked—the evolving nature, quality, and importance of our associational life. In other words, *what we do together*.

Through a series of reports and hearings, it will study the state of the relationships that weave together the social fabric enabling our country—our laws, our institutions, our markets, and our democracy—to function so well in the first place.

Why does the health of America’s associational life feel so compromised? Where *is* it compromised? What consequences have followed from declining social capital? Why do some communities have more robust civil society than others? What can be done—or can stop being done—to grow Americans’ stock of social capital? What will enable us to live better together?

The pages that follow first seek to define “associational life,” “social capital,” and related concepts, providing a brief intellectual history of these ideas. A broad overview of trends in the state of associational life follows. Our analyses will be organized by considering four domains of associational life—family, religion, community, and work—and we focus specifically on painting a picture of changes in what we do together. Finally, we preview some of the issues and topics we will be studying in the years ahead.

WHAT IS “ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE”?

Many people in many eras have defined and described the importance of social relationships for sustaining a free, democratic, and prosperous society—using a variety of terms such as “civil society,” “mediating institutions,” “intermediate associations,” and the more recently popular “social capital.”¹⁹

There is little consensus about what exactly these terms include. For instance, some writers have included market relationships in their definition of associational life, while others have explicitly excluded them. Many have disagreed about the inclusion of family or politics under the umbrella of civil society. Some even distinguish between face-to-face interaction and those relationships not mediated by face-to-face contact (e.g., large, impersonal national membership organizations). Despite these important differences, the Social Capital Project will take a big-tent approach to these issues. We use “associational life” as shorthand for the web of social relationships through which we pursue joint endeavors—namely, our families, our communities, our workplaces, and our religious congregations.

Doing justice to the breadth of scholarship on civil society is beyond the scope of this paper, but we review briefly the contributions of a few key thinkers in order to provide historical context and to establish its contemporary relevance.

The foremost chronicler of what Americans do together was Alexis de Tocqueville, whose nine-month trip to the United States in the early nineteenth century resulted in his two-volume treatise *Democracy in America*.²⁰ Tocqueville was particularly interested in the ways in which Americans spontaneously organized themselves in the service of self-governance, thereby establishing widespread norms and habits of association. He observed that what gave the United States its unique character and strength was our proclivity to form associations of all kinds, and in so doing to see

our interests in the shared interests of others. As Don Eberly puts it,

*Tocqueville was amazed at the almost limitless sweep of this activity. Civil society captured nearly all forms of human endeavors—intellectual, moral, social, religious, and as some insist, economic. Civic functions overlapped sometimes with political, and even those purely civic activities served to cultivate democratic habits and skills. In the truest sense, they were laboratories of democracy. Local civic associations put democracy within people's reach, inculcating the customs and many uses of democratic process, tempering self-interest and isolation.*²¹

In the middle of the twentieth century, sociologist and intellectual historian Robert Nisbet wrote powerfully about the role of “intermediate associations” in a free society. By intermediate associations, Nisbet simply meant the social relationships and groups that play some functional role in our lives. In his 1953 book, *The Quest for Community*, he notes that the human need for associational life “will not be denied, for it springs from some of the powerful needs of human nature—needs for a clear sense of cultural purpose, membership, status, and continuity.”²² Nisbet was particularly worried that if people did not find belonging and purpose in human-scale intermediate associations of family, religion, and other forms of communal life, they would find it elsewhere—a grave prospect in the context of World War II, communism, and fascism.

In the late 1970s, the idea of the middle social layers was given attention by a group of writers and thinkers at the American Enterprise Institute.²³ The “mediating structures project,”²⁴ as it came to be known, sought to think through how we might use local social organizations to provide social services such as welfare, education, housing, and so on. The participants in that project, spanning much of the ideological spectrum, vehemently disagreed about the relationship between the state and mediating institutions, but the project helped carry the idea to a new generation.²⁵

Others have added to this long tradition by attempting to conceptualize and measure the causes, consequences, and importance of what we do together under the broad umbrella of “social capital.” The earliest known use of the term comes from 1916, when L. J. Hanifan first used it to describe “tangible substances [that] count for most in the daily lives of a people, namely goodwill, fellowship, mutual sympathy and social intercourse.”²⁶ Urbanist Jane Jacobs described social capital as neighborhood networks of mutual assistance and self-governance.²⁷ Sociologist James S. Coleman defined social capital as something realized in social networks that facilitated productive cooperation.²⁸ In short, these early definitions described social capital as a resource for solving collective action problems.

More recently, Robert Putnam revived the notion of social capital in his 1993 book *Making Democracy Work*.²⁹ In an article summarizing that book, he defined social capital as “features of social organization, such as networks, norms, and trust, that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit.”³⁰ He later elaborated on

the idea of social capital in his bestselling book *Bowling Alone*, in which he defined social capital in similar terms as “connections among individuals—social networks and the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them.”³¹ Widely lauded at the time, *Bowling Alone* took a broad view of the health of American life, showing general (though not unqualified) declines in various measures of associational life including political participation, community and civic involvement, religious participation, informal social connections, volunteering, and trust.

In his book *Trust*, Francis Fukuyama argued for the importance to societies of non-familial sources of trust and cooperation, borrowing from James Coleman’s definition of social capital as “the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations.”³² In a related 1995 book, *The Great Disruption*, he makes the case that the transition from an industrial economy to one based on knowledge weakened our social capital, which he defined as “a set of informal values or norms shared among members of a group that permits cooperation among them.”³³ Nevertheless, he argued, “social order, once disrupted, tends to get remade again,” because “human beings are by nature social creatures, whose most basic drives and instincts lead them to create moral rules that bind themselves together into communities.”³⁴

Since the mid-1990s, research about social capital has dramatically increased.³⁵ It has become a topic of interest to researchers around the world, precipitating extensive projects at the World Bank and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).³⁶ Nobel Laureate economist Elinor Ostrom has advocated the concept as “an essential complement to the concepts of natural, physical, and human capital.”³⁷ Many researchers have applied a variety of methods to understand aspects of social capital and the importance of related concepts to such topics as political life, social cohesion, volunteerism, work, civic participation, health, and happiness.³⁸

However, progress in the research has been slow due to a number of significant challenges. There are bright spots in the literature, but it generally suffers from challenges in definition, conceptualization, and measurement. As a recent National Academy of Sciences report notes,

Because the terms “social capital,” “civic engagement,” and “social cohesion” refer to broad and malleably-defined concepts that take on different meanings depending on the context, they are not amenable to direct statistical measurement. However, dimensions of these broad constructs—the behaviors, attitudes, social ties, and experiences—can be more narrowly and tangibly defined and are thus more feasibly measured.^{39, 40}

“Social capital” has emerged as the most widely used and familiar shorthand for the concepts discussed here, but it remains a slippery term. It is not always clear, for instance, whether the dimensions associated with it constitute the thing “social capital,” are products that flow from social capital, or are lubricants that facilitate the development of social capital. We will not attempt to resolve these ambiguities.

Instead, the project will use more or less precise terms as needed while, above all, emphasizing the importance of formal and informal social networks and associations that inhabit the space between the individual and large public and private institutions.

WHY IS ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE IMPORTANT?

In the intellectual tradition of studying associational life and its cousins, there emerge three key reasons why it is important.

First, the middle social layers are implicated in nearly every aspect of our lives, and therefore are critically important formative structures in which human development occurs. What we do together affects our character, capacities, deepest held moral commitments, and any number of other aspects of who we are.

Second, mediating institutions provide an important role in giving meaning and purpose to individual lives. “Meaning” and “purpose” are words that give hives to empirically minded social scientists, but nonetheless deserve our attention. Jointly pursuing common goals—prosaic or profound—draws people out of themselves, gives them a reason to get up in the morning, and to be responsive to the needs of others. When people lack the meaning and purpose derived from strong bonds and routine social attachments, they are more prone to alienation and atomization.⁴¹ Along these lines, David Brooks has argued, “The great challenge of our moment is the crisis of isolation and fragmentation, the need to rebind the fabric of a society that has been torn by selfishness, cynicism, distrust, and autonomy.”⁴²

The third reason our middle social layers are so important, especially today, is that they provide a useful means for discovering solutions to problems. The large institutions of our modern society, polity, and economy are often ill-equipped to address needs that are unique to the particular “circumstances of time and place.”⁴³ They are sometimes too far removed from local sources of knowledge and networks of trust, and they can be slow to adapt as problems evolve. Some can be out of touch with the values of specific places, breeding resentment and fueling regional polarization. As many analysts have concluded, decentralizing authority and decision-making capacity to our middle layers might go a long way to increasing America’s ability to address challenges incrementally through trial and error in ways that are much closer to the people and their varied situations.⁴⁴

An emphasis on the middle layers of our social life is no panacea for the many challenges and opportunities we face. But in an era where many of our conversations seem to revolve around the individual and large institutions, an emphasis on the space between them could bring many benefits. The rest of this report examines trends in various aspects of associational life. It will intermittently return to the basic question of why associational life matters.

HOW HAS ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE CHANGED?

It is impossible for a report of this length to adequately survey the evidence on all the consequential ways that associational life has changed over the years. Instead, we have chosen to focus on available indicators fulfilling two requirements. First, we are interested in describing relatively long-term changes over some constant period of time. After reviewing the available evidence, we chose to focus on trends between the early 1970s and the 2010s—roughly the past 45 years. Second, we have chosen to focus as much as possible on indicators that illustrate what we do together, rather than look at any number of social or economic problems that might be presumed to reflect the state of associational life.

To organize the discussion, we assess changes in four domains of associational life, drawing on the work of previous scholars. Specifically, we take in turn changes in families, religious congregations, secular communities, and workplaces.

Families Together

We come into the world met with the joyous smiles of family, and we leave it with family mourning the loss. In between, if we are fortunate, we forge our strongest social connections with children, spouses, parents, siblings, and other relatives—with family. All subsequent social capital investment begins with the bonds between parents and children. These bonds provide purpose to parents' lives, happiness, and a connection to previous and future generations. Through parents, children receive physical sustenance and emotional support, acquire language and other skills and dispositions, and form values, beliefs, and aspirations. The development of secure connections with parents facilitates the formation of secure attachments to other people—including future partners and children, in whom parents' stock of social capital is reinvested. Social capital obtained and created within the family is practically a necessity for all other forms of associational life.

So much of what we do together occurs in families into which we are born or that we choose to create in adulthood. The institution of marriage has weakened significantly in recent decades, but vast majorities of young Americans still hope to get married someday.⁴⁵ We also derive benefits from a range of other family relationships—not just with our children, spouses, and parents, but our brothers, sisters, grandparents, grandchildren, in-laws, cousins, aunts, and uncles. In many communities, these relationships assume special importance, as with the strong role grandparents often play in black communities or the deep extended family connections in Latino families. The happiness our family relationships impart is the most vivid illustration of the importance of healthy associational life.

Married couples, for example, report higher life satisfaction than single adults.⁴⁶ While people predisposed to be happy are presumably likelier to get married in

the first place, evidence suggests that marriage has a positive causal effect on life satisfaction. Around the world, the well-known midlife dip in life satisfaction is moderated by being married.⁴⁷

Indeed, vast bodies of research find that married couples and their children tend to have better outcomes than single people and the children of single parents. Unfortunately, methodological problems render most—though not all—of these studies unpersuasive.⁴⁸ However, if we stipulate uncontroversially that *happy* marriages provide at least some of the beneficial outcomes to adults and children that the research claims is produced by “marriage,” we can avoid, for now, divisive debates over what public policy should or should not do to promote marriage. And the research is clear that on average, marriage is associated with innumerable positive outcomes.⁴⁹

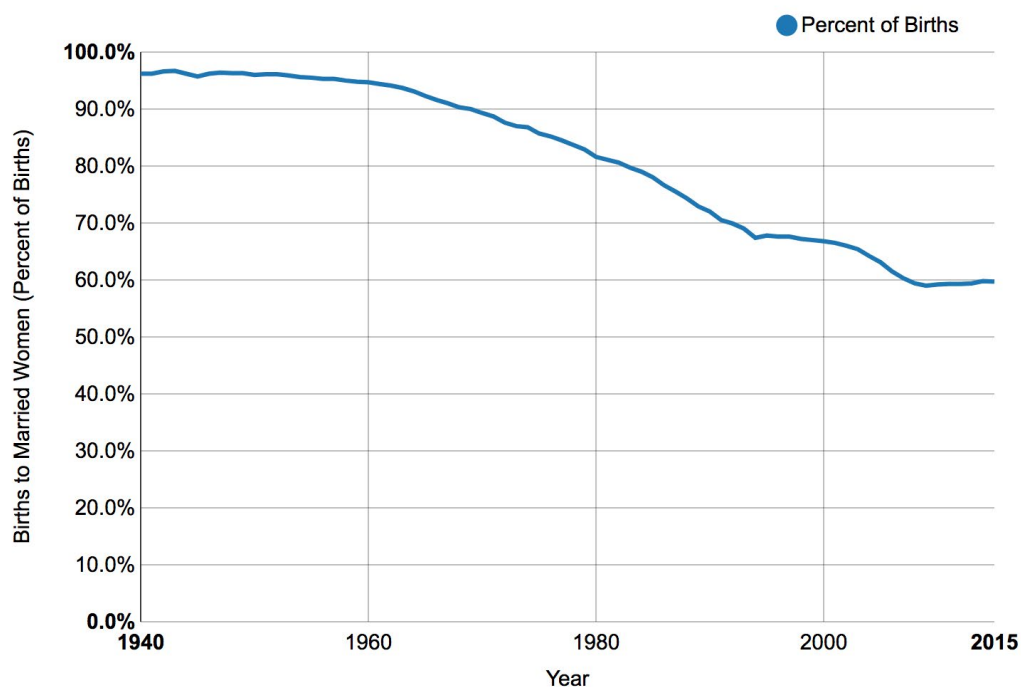
Research on extended family’s effects suffer from similar analytical challenges but also accord with the intuition that healthy family relationships impart benefits.⁵⁰ It requires little insight to note that adult children provide help to their aging parents, and parents provide support to their adult children in the form of financial help, advice, and child care.

Trends in Family Associational Life: Closeness of Family Connections

Americans do not appear less likely to live near their parents in adulthood than in the past. A useful indicator is the share of adults living in their birth state. Research has shown that living in one’s childhood state in adulthood is strongly correlated with living near a parent.⁵¹ Between 1970 and 2015, the percentage of native-born Americans age 25 to 54 who lived in their birth state (and who thus tended to live near their parents) stayed about the same, rising from 63 percent to 64 percent.⁵² The share of prime-age adults with children living near the children’s grandparents was flat at 64 percent.

According to the General Social Survey, 38 percent of adults in 1974 said they spent a social evening with relatives several times a week or more, while 39 percent did in 2016.⁵³ It is clearly the case that children are less likely to be cared for during the workweek by a parent. For example, between 1975 and 2011, the share of three- and four-year-olds cared for by a parent during the day declined from 80 percent to somewhere between 24 and 48 percent.⁵⁴ This profound change reflects the increase in work among mothers in recent decades.

Percent of Births Occurring to Married Women, 1940-2015



Source: 1940-2006 are from Solomon-Fears (2008), Table A-1; 2007 from Martin et al. (2010a), Table 18; 2008 from Martin et al. (2010b), Table 15; 2009 from Martin et al. (2011), Table 15; 2010-2013 from Solomon-Fears (2014), Table 1; 2014 from Hamilton et al. (2015), Table 15; 2015 from Martin et al. (2017), Table 15.

However, evidence from time-use surveys suggests that both mothers and fathers are nonetheless spending more time with their children than in the past.⁵⁵ Even though more mothers are working, school-age children are not around during the day anyway during the school year. Parents appear to have otherwise compensated for any additional time they spend at the workplace versus the past.⁵⁶

Evidence does indicate, however, that parents and children are less likely today to participate with each other in activities at home than they were in the past.⁵⁷ Claude Fischer speculates that this circle can be squared if parents are spending more time with children outside the home, such as at restaurants and stores, play dates, and extracurricular activities.⁵⁸

Family Formation and Dissolution

Another indication of diminished family connections is that the number of adults living in families has declined over the past 45 years. Between 1973 and 2016, the percentage of Americans age 18-64 who lived with a relative declined from 92 percent to 79 percent.⁵⁹ The decline was driven by a dramatic 21-point drop in the percentage who were living with a spouse, from 71 percent to 50 percent. Adults who would have been married in the early 1970s were instead cohabiting (possibly

as a parent, up from less than one percent to 9 percent); living alone (up from 6 to 11 percent); living with other relatives (possibly just their own child, up from 8 to 12 percent); living with roommates (up from under 2 to 4 percent); or living in a parent's household (slightly up from 13 to 14 percent). Between 1973 and 2016, among 25- to 34-year-olds, the share who were living with a spouse dropped from 78 percent to 41 percent, and the drop among women 18-24 was from 44 percent to 9 percent.⁶⁰

Marriage rates have plummeted over the past several decades. In 1970, there were 76.5 marriages per 1,000 unmarried women aged 15 and older. As of 2015, that rate had declined by more than half to 32 per thousand.⁶¹ Americans are getting married later, and more of us are not marrying at all. In 1970, the median age at first marriage was 21 among women and 23 among men. By 2016, those medians were 27.5 and 29.5—both higher by six and a half years.⁶² Between 1970 and 2015, the share of Americans aged 50 to 54 who had never married rose from 6 percent to 14.5 percent.⁶³

These trends have numerous causes, including rising educational and employment opportunities for women, increasing affluence, and the sexual revolution. Marriage is simply not viewed as being as necessary as it once was. Increasingly, long-term romantic relationships involve couples who are unmarried but living together. Among women aged 19 to 44 who married between 1965 and 1974, just 11 percent had cohabited with their husband prior to marriage. That was true of 66 percent of women 19-44 who married between 2005 and 2009.⁶⁴

An important reason for rising cohabitation is the increasing fragility of marriage, which has led more couples to “try out” relationships with each other before committing to an institution that has seen rising failure rates over time. The divorce rate was 15 per 1,000 married women in 1970. It rose throughout the 1970s, as no-fault divorce spread throughout the country, then fell thereafter to about 18 per 1,000 in 2010, still higher than in 1970.

However, this decline was in part a product of baby boomers aging out of high-divorce life stages into low-divorce ones. If the distribution of married women across ages had been the same in 1970 as it was in 2010, the divorce rate would have risen steadily, from about 10 per 1,000 in 1970 to 18 per 1,000 in 2010.⁶⁵

These trends can also be interpreted in terms of Americans perceiving marriage as less necessary. The spread of no-fault divorce reflected demand for easier exits from marriage; between 1973 and 2016, the share of adults saying divorce should be easier to obtain rose from 32 percent to 38 percent.⁶⁶ We might expect that as rising divorce removed unhappy couples from the stock of married families, the remaining husbands and wives would be more satisfied with their marriages. However, between 1973 and 2016, the share of them reporting being in a “very happy” marriage actually fell from 67 percent to 60 percent.⁶⁷

In contrast to the non-elderly population, living arrangements were much more stable among Americans aged 65 and older. In 1973, 71 percent lived with a relative, and 70 percent did in 2016.⁶⁸ Elderly women became more likely to live with a spouse and less likely to live with another relative, while elderly men became more likely to live alone and less likely to live with a spouse or other relative. These changes reflect longer lifespans. Since women tend to marry older men, greater longevity results in more marriage for women (who do not become widowed as early as in the past), more living alone for men (who are more likely to outlive their younger wives than in the past), and less reliance on other family members.

Fertility

Along with delayed and declining marriage has come delayed and declining childbearing. Between 1970 and 2015, the average age at which women first give birth increased from about 21 years to about 26 years.⁶⁹ In 1970, 56 percent of American families included at least one child, but by 2016 just 42 percent did.⁷⁰ The average family with children had 2.3 children in 1970 but just 1.9 in 2016. Among all families—with or without children—the average number of children per family has dropped from 1.3 to 0.8.⁷¹

The decline in fertility appears to reflect a diminished interest in having children. Between 1972 and 2016, the share of adults with four or more children fell from 25 percent to 15 percent. The share who said the ideal number of children was four or more fell from 28 percent to 15 percent.⁷²

Family Instability

The subject of family breakdown—the declining share of children living with two biological parents—has generated controversy for much of the past 50 years. The crux of the debate turns on a number of questions. Do the typically better outcomes of children with two parents reflect the importance of having two parents or simply the more advantageous attributes and circumstances of those with intact marriages? Would the children of single parents do better if their actual parents—not hypothetical ones—stayed together? What are the chances that the trend in single parenthood can be reversed? Are the benefits of promoting two-parent families worth the cost in the form of possible stigmatization of single parents and their children?

These are questions the Social Capital Project will be exploring in future papers. For present purposes, we assert only a proposition that we take to be uncontroversial: healthy family relationships are valuable and constitute the most fundamental sphere of associational life. The fact that so many children today grow up in disrupted families is a cause for great concern to the extent that we can imagine a world in which many more children are raised by two happily married biological parents. Progressives and conservatives may disagree about what it would take to produce more healthy marriages—more economic

opportunity? public campaigns to promote marriage?—but the goal of doing so need not be ideological or controversial.

Between 1970 and 2016, the share of children being raised by a single parent (or by neither parent) rose from 15 percent to 31 percent.⁷³ Over half of the children of high school graduates with no postsecondary education live with a single parent, and three in five children of parents without a high school diploma.⁷⁴ In part because of this educational disadvantage, more than three in five African American children live with a single parent, though single parenthood has increased sharply among non-Hispanic whites and Hispanics as well.⁷⁵ These estimates assess living arrangements at a point in time, but a majority of American children can expect to live with a single parent at some point before reaching the age of sixteen.⁷⁶

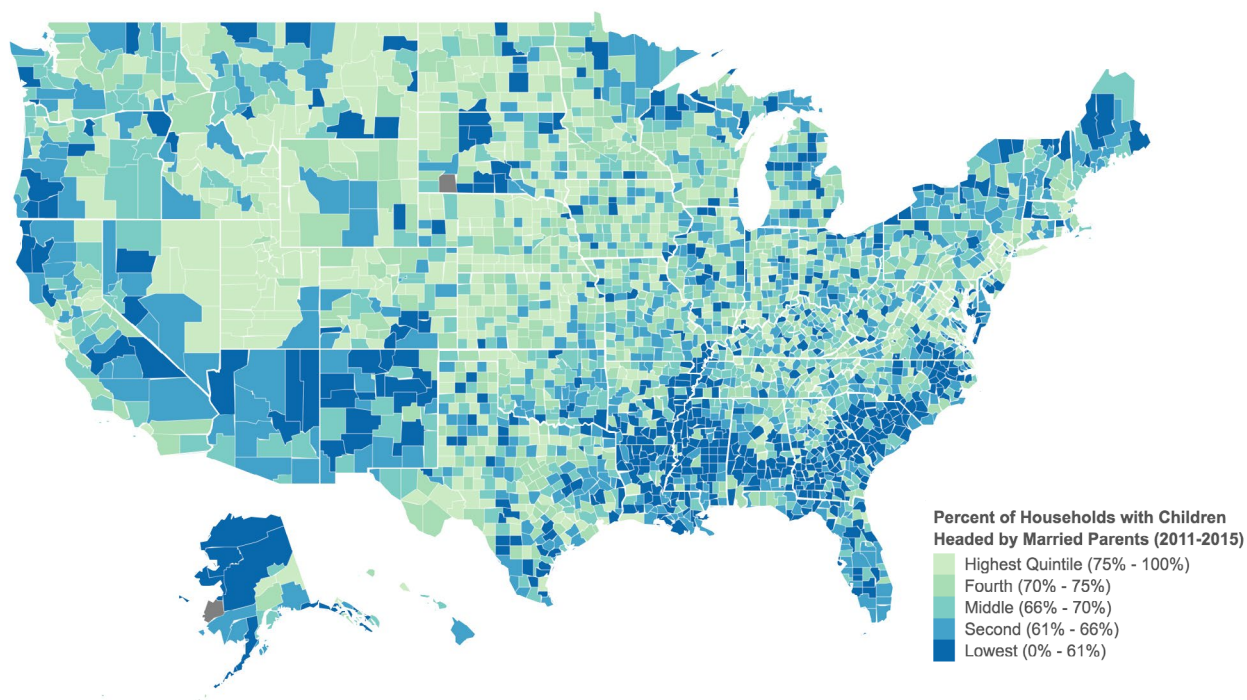
Single parenthood has risen both because of an increase in divorce and due to a rise in unwed childbearing. Between 1970 and 2015, births to single mothers as a share of all births rose from 11 percent to 40 percent.⁷⁷

Much of the increase in unwed childbearing is due to rising cohabitation. Fifty-eight percent of unmarried mothers are cohabiting at the time of their child's birth.⁷⁸ However, cohabiting relationships tend to be much less stable than marriages. Half of children born to cohabiting parents will see their mother's relationship to one or more men break up by their third birthday, compared to just 13 percent of children in married-parent families.⁷⁹

From a number of perspectives, then, families seem to associate together no less than in the past. They spend comparable time with their families, despite the increase in work among mothers, and appear to live as close to family members as before. But Americans spend less time in families today, reflecting the decline in marriage. They also have fewer children, which seems to reflect falling demand for them. Instead, Americans are marrying and having children later than in the past and cohabiting more. These trends reflect increasing individualism and pursuit of non-familial ends. While we may be no worse off individually for marrying and having children later, these trends may have reduced social cooperation to the extent that family life promotes community engagement.

More to the point, the decline in marriage partly reflects the weakness of the institution, as marriages have been increasingly likely to dissolve over time and the remaining marriages appear to be less happy than in the past. And these trends have almost certainly not been benign for children. Many single parents do as good a job or better as many married parents at investing in their children. But it is hard not to conclude that if we had managed to shore up marriage these past decades, children today—to say nothing of parents—would be much better connected to valuable family ties. Increasing family disconnection is of particular concern considering the role that family plays as the foundation for all other relationships.

Percent of Households with Children Headed by Married Parents by County, 2011-2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates.

WORSHIPING TOGETHER

The state of religion in America is a topic that may be approached from many different perspectives. The Social Capital Project's interest in religion is a specific one: historically, religious institutions have been of primary importance in creating and maintaining extra-familial social ties and dense community networks. That is to say, religious institutions may be considered purely as highly effective incubators of social capital without regard to specific religious doctrines. From Tocqueville to Nisbet to Putnam, many observers of society have remarked on the importance of religion in drawing people out of their private lives and into associational life.

As Putnam put it in *Bowling Alone*

Faith communities in which people worship together are arguably the single most important repository of social capital in America....As a rough rule of thumb, our evidence shows, nearly half of all associational memberships in America are church related, half of all personal philanthropy is religious in character, and half of all volunteering occurs in a religious context.⁸⁰

Religious institutions that convene people under the banner of shared beliefs have powerful community-promoting advantages as compared with secular institutions. They provide a vehicle for like-minded people to associate, through regular attendance at religious services and other events and charitable activities they sponsor. Religious institutions are highly effective at enforcing commitment to shared principles and norms of behavior, passed down over generations.

These commitments are often themselves pro-social and other-regarding. Churches and other places of worship encourage coreligionists to bond in the context of denominational activities. But they also facilitate associational life among adherents outside religious activities and thereby produce wide-ranging benefits. People who live in communities where their coreligionists are more numerous have higher household incomes, greater educational attainment, higher marriage rates and lower divorce rates, and there is reason to believe these associations reflect the effects of living with coreligionists rather than being incidental.⁸¹

Further, religious institutions encourage investment in social ties outside the denomination. Putnam reports that people committed to religion

*are much more likely than other people to visit friends, to entertain at home, to attend club meetings, and to belong to sports groups; professional and academic societies; school service groups; youth groups; service clubs; hobby or garden clubs; literary, art, discussion, and study groups; school fraternities and sororities; farm organizations; political clubs; nationality groups; and other miscellaneous groups.*⁸²

Religious membership is also strongly correlated with “voting, jury service, community projects, talking with neighbors, and giving to charity.”⁸³ Putnam and David Campbell surveyed Americans and found that 91 percent of those volunteering for a religious group also volunteered for a secular group.⁸⁴ Further, only one-third of adults who did not volunteer for a religious group volunteered for a secular one. “Regular churchgoers,” say Putnam and Campbell, “are more likely to give to secular causes than nonchurchgoers,” and the religious give more of their money to such causes when they donate.⁸⁵

Based on surveys in 2004 and 2006, frequent churchgoers were more likely than other Americans to engage in nine specific pro-social and altruistic behaviors, and they were no less likely to engage in five other ones. Putnam and Campbell found these relationships still held after taking into account a variety of demographic and economic variables. Religious Americans are also more trusting of people than other Americans are, and they are generally trusted more as well.⁸⁶

Most importantly for the purposes of this project, it appears that religious membership is associated with participation in community life specifically because of the social capital it creates between religious adherents. Holding

constant a person's general connectedness, the connectedness that comes through interacting with other congregants strongly predicts a range of indicators related to social capital. As Putnam and Campbell put it, "It is religious belonging that matters for neighborliness, not religious believing."⁸⁷

It is certainly possible that a healthy associational life and rich networks of interdependency can develop and sustain themselves organically, powered by the utilitarian ends they fulfill. But it may be that community requires the support of mediating institutions in order to thrive. Social capital, like physical capital, requires investment and reinvestment. That need for replenishment is costly, requiring time, cooperation, compromise, patience, and social discomfort. Mediating institutions may be uniquely able to enforce commitment among members of a community to sustain associational life, thereby promoting opportunity and happiness. Few domains in the secular world—the Armed Forces serving as an exception—are able to generate such commitment.

Consider a recent profile of Utah by columnist Megan McArdle, exploring the reasons for its high rates of economic mobility.⁸⁸ McArdle's depiction of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints highlights the remarkable degree to which it has institutionalized mutual responsibility, cooperation, and service:

The volunteering starts in the church wards, where bishops keep a close eye on what's going on in the congregation, and tap members as needed to help each other. If you're out of work, they may reach out to small business people to find out who's hiring. If your marriage is in trouble, they'll find a couple who went through a hard time themselves to offer advice.

But it does not stop with informal networks. Mormon youth are encouraged to go on missions. Many of them evangelize, of course, but others end up doing work for the church....Every Mormon is expected to skip two meals a month, and to donate at least the value of the food they would have bought (and preferably more) to help the needy. They're also encouraged to volunteer for the church.

It is difficult to imagine how such social capital can be maintained in the absence of the kind of commitment that organized religion marshals (or that military institutions demand of those who choose to serve). A central concern of the Social Capital Project will be how to promote commitment to healthy associational life—within families, neighborhoods, workplaces, schools, polities, and the nation as a whole.

TRENDS IN RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

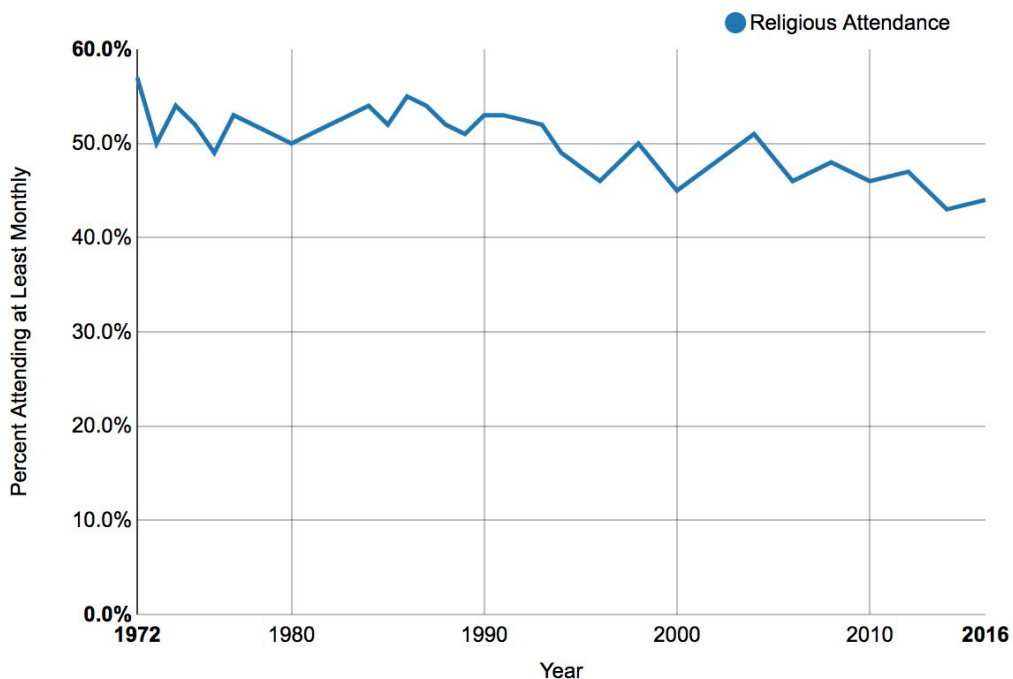
What has happened to associational life in the domain of religion? The story is discouraging, which raises deeper concerns about the health of our associational life more broadly. By the early 1970s, Americans were already worshipping together less than they had in the 1950s and early 1960s. As Yuval Levin notes, “the ‘me’ decade” ushered in an era characterized “by an ethic of individualism and atomism” in religious life and beyond.⁸⁹

The result was, in the words of Wade Clark Roof and William McKinney, a

*tendency toward highly individualized religious psychology without the benefits of strong supportive attachments to believing communities.... In this climate of expressive individualism, religion tends to become “privatized,” or more anchored in the personal realms.*⁹⁰

That said, in the early 1970s, nearly seven in ten adults in America were still members of a church or synagogue.⁹¹ While fewer Americans attended religious service regularly, 50 to 57 percent did so at least once per month.⁹² Today, just 55 percent of adults are members of a church or synagogue, while just 42 to 44 percent attend religious service at least monthly.⁹³

Percent of Adults Attending Religious Services at Least Once a Month, 1972-2016



Source: General Social Survey, 1972-2016. <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/projects/27817/variables/294/vshow>.

The evidence on religious adherence—including church membership but also other forms of engagement with a denomination—is less reliable, but our analyses indicate a similar decline.⁹⁴ Even among religious adherents, the influence of the largest mainline churches has eroded sharply over time, giving way to a “more decentralized, personalized, evangelical Christianity.”⁹⁵ The new Christian denominations are more individualist and comprise a more diffuse structure, features that are less amenable to social capital investment.

The declines in church attendance and religious affiliation appear to have occurred primarily among Americans who were only loosely attached to congregations to begin with.⁹⁶ A disproportionate share of these marginal adherents were poor or working class.⁹⁷

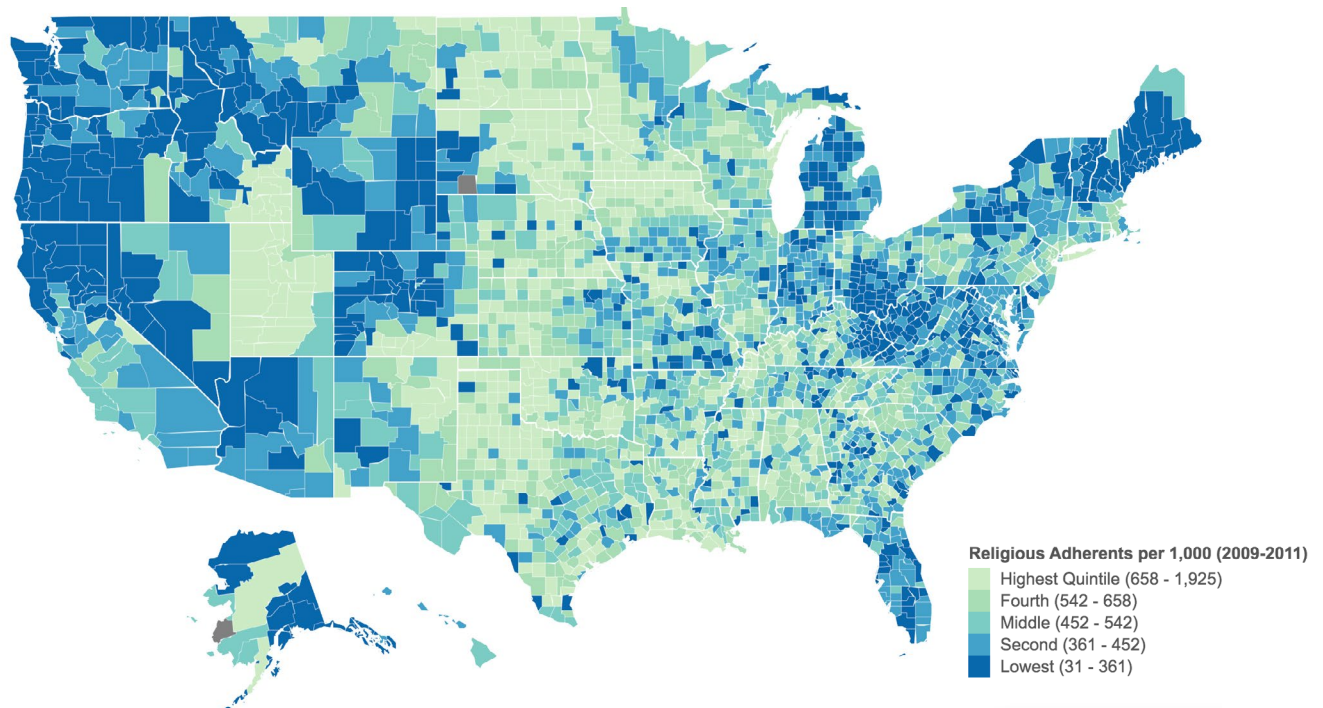
The decline in religious association was partly due to a decline in religiosity, though it must be the case that each affected the other. In the early 1970s, 98 percent of adults had been raised in a religion, and just 5 percent reported no religious preference. Today, however, the share of adults who report having been raised in a religion is down to 91 percent, and 18 to 22 percent of adults report no religious preference.⁹⁸

Declining trust in religious institutions also likely has played an important role in weakening religious associational life. In 1973, two-thirds of adults had “quite a lot” or “a great deal” of confidence in “the church or organized religion,” and in another survey the same year, 36 percent reported “a great deal” of confidence in organized religion. By 2016, those numbers had fallen to 41 percent and 20 percent, respectively.⁹⁹

More generally, the decline in religious participation may signal that mediating institutions are simply losing the battle against aspects of individualism that make commitment to community norms and standards burdensome. Personal freedom in matters of sexuality and gender identity, for example, has become a more important value since the mid-twentieth century. Though not their primary purpose, religious organizations—like mediating institutions generally—bind us together for human betterment. But norms and practices that define intentional communities can become viewed as unproductive and illegitimate over time. The one broadly anti-social trait that Putnam and Campbell found to be more common among religious adherents than among other Americans was stronger intolerance of the groups and practices that each are inclined to disfavor. (It should be noted, though, that tolerance has been rising among religious adherents.)¹⁰⁰

Any revival of associational life will have to grapple with the tension between the good that comes from binding people through mediating institutions and the alienation that can arise from *bounding* community in rigid ways. But if membership in a religious community improves outcomes for congregants, and if those lower down the socioeconomic ladder are especially at risk of becoming religiously disconnected, we might worry about the erosion of congregational religious life.

Religious Adherents per Thousand People, by County, 2009-2011



Source: U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations and Membership Study, 2010 (County File), The Association of Religion Data Archives.
Note: Some counties have adherence rates above 1,000, indicating more adherents in the county than residents. In those cases, it is likely that people in neighboring counties commute in.

LIVING TOGETHER IN COMMUNITIES

“Americans of all ages, all conditions, all minds,” Tocqueville wrote,

*constantly unite. Not only do they have commercial and industrial associations in which all take part, but they also have a thousand other kinds: religious, moral, grave, futile, very general and very particular, immense and very small....*¹⁰¹

What we do together outside our families, workplaces, and houses of worship encompasses a wide variety of important social activity—everyday informal interaction with friends and neighbors, involvement with schools, participation in civic associations, and other voluntary cooperative pursuits. The relationships we forge within these activities are vital sources of companionship, social support, mutual aid, information, and self-governance. The communities to which we belong develop the civic skills and social norms that reinforce reciprocity, trust, and cooperation.

In turn, these elements of social capital strengthen community. For example, high levels of civic engagement are associated with better public governance.¹⁰² An atomized society with limited capacity for cooperation is no society at all. It

will face economic stagnation or decline relative to others in which members work together.

At the same time, communities are defined by who they include, or conversely, who they exclude. The dark side of community is that it sometimes comes with costs for those left out.¹⁰³ Moreover, even in-group members are likely worse off to the extent that distinct communities do not overlap or interact. Community builds internal social ties—“bonding social capital”—but it can impede investment in “bridging social capital” that connects groups to each other.¹⁰⁴

Neighborhoods, which provide a natural setting for community networks to thrive, clearly illustrate this tension. Neighborhoods with a healthy associational life provide untold benefits to their residents. Research has shown that communities with higher levels of trust and where people are more inclined to confront community problems also experience lower crime.¹⁰⁵ Communities where people help and look out for each other are also more likely to pool common resources when necessary, for example, in the aftermath of a natural disaster.¹⁰⁶ In addition, neighborhoods with a healthy associational life appear to provide children with more opportunities. Economists Raj Chetty and Nathaniel Hendren found that counties with high social capital tend to have high rates of upward mobility, and most of this correlation reflects a causal impact.¹⁰⁷

These benefits aside, however, because of residential segregation by income, race, and other attributes, neighborhood advantages enjoyed by families in the communities richest in social capital are often mirrored in disadvantages faced by residents of other neighborhoods. When those families with fewer financial and personal assets are left behind, the result can be a deficit of social capital—of “monitoring, socializing, mentoring, and organizing”—that leaves the vulnerable even more disadvantaged.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, Chetty and Hendren find that high levels of segregation impede upward mobility.

Similarly, schools provide another important source of community for parents and children but also reflect segregation between communities. Research suggests that parental involvement in schools promotes higher school quality and better child outcomes.¹⁰⁹ But given there is wide variation in the effectiveness of schools from one district to the next, the neighborhood in which one lives can be of great consequence. Concerns about school quality have driven an increase in residential segregation by income, as more affluent families increasingly cluster in the best school districts.¹¹⁰

At the national level, we have seen a growing rift between—to put it in terms that are too broad—cosmopolitan urban metropolises and traditional rural communities. This essentially regional segregation has bred antipathy, borne of a deficit of bridging social capital. As the scope of the federal government has grown and Washington has taken away more discretion from state and local governments, the stakes of our national politics have become higher. Traditionalists and cosmopolitans, threatened with ceding authority to people with divergent values on the other side, have reacted with mutual hostility.

One open question is the impact that technology will have on our associational life. From email to text messaging to social networks to video chats, communications innovations have led to some dramatic shifts in the way we interact with each other. Some behaviors on the internet may be isolating, while others enable greater frequency of connection and larger breadth of connections with others. With virtual reality breakthroughs just over the horizon, it also remains to be seen whether the home entertainment revolution that has encompassed on-demand TV, streaming services, apps, and video gaming will ultimately promote or retard investment in social capital.

Trends in Community Life: Being Social

The data are not entirely consistent, but it appears that the time we spend interacting with others socially has changed less than many earlier observers believed. A decade ago, media reports widely publicized a study that the number of Americans who have no one with whom to discuss an important issue had risen dramatically over the prior 30 years.¹¹¹ However, after reanalyses of the data and new evidence, the consensus today appears to be that it has risen only modestly if at all.¹¹²

Entertaining friends in one's home has become less common since the early 1970s, but apparently Americans are making up for it by doing more with friends outside the home.¹¹³ The percent of adults who say they spend a social evening with "friends outside the neighborhood" at least several times a week was stable between 1974 and 2016, at about 19 to 24 percent.¹¹⁴ Reinforcing these findings, time-use surveys suggest that the combined time adults spend engaged in social activities at home, visiting the homes of others, going to parties, or attending events has not changed much between the early 1970s and today. Nor has the time spent engaged in any activities (these or other ones) with friends.¹¹⁵

The biggest change in informal social life outside the home and workplace is that socializing has become rarer between neighbors. Between 1974 and 2016, the percent of adults who say they spend a social evening with a neighbor at least several times a week fell from 30 percent to 19 percent.¹¹⁶ In part, this is likely a consequence of suburbanization and declining population density.¹¹⁷ Relatedly, Americans are less reliant on public spaces and amenities and more so on private ones than in the past. For instance, we increasingly rely on private gyms and swimming pools, and we are less likely to use public transit or to carpool.¹¹⁸ The movement into the workforce of married women and mothers is another important factor behind declining neighborliness. When more mothers were homemakers, social interaction was more centered around the neighborhood and its children.

The rise of the internet and the technology that connects us to it has also likely reduced interaction with neighbors. We can now connect more with those we care most about through email, text messaging, video chats, and social

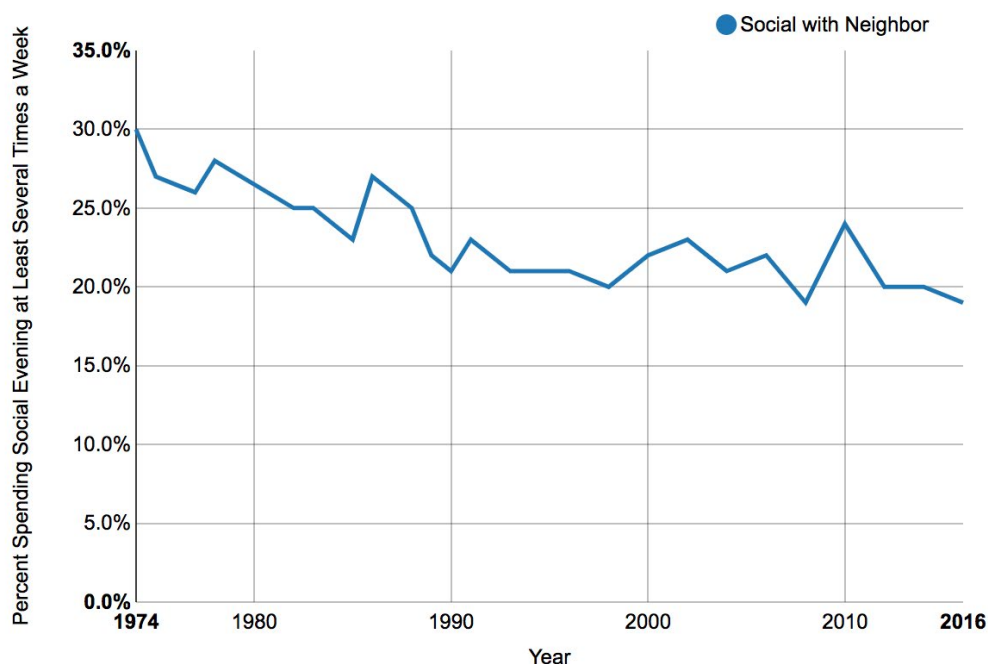
media, while face-to-face interactions with neighbors with whom we have less in common are increasingly unnecessary.¹¹⁹

Suburbanization, expanded economic options for women, and communications technological development all reflect rising affluence. As our society has grown richer, the impetus to interact with our neighbors—reflecting their proximity rather than our commonalities—has diminished. In response, we have retreated into more private lives shared with those with whom we connect most easily, regardless of whether they live next door or across the country. In a sense, this shift mirrors the rise of romantic love and personal similarity as criteria for mate selection over traditional pragmatic economic concerns and geographic convenience.

Social Segregation

From an even broader perspective, and a more problematic one, technology has also allowed us to interact less—either in-person or online—with anyone whose values or opinions are different than our own.¹²⁰ That has likely contributed to a breakdown in bridging social capital confined not just to our neighbors but to our fellow citizens generally. And while we may be interacting less with our neighbors than in the past, on a number of dimensions we seem to care more who our neighbors are than we used to.

Percent of Adults Spending a Social Evening with a Neighbor at Least Several Times a Week, 1974-2016



Source: General Social Survey. Authors' tabulations using GSS Data Explorer. <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/projects/27817/variables/522/vshow>.

On the one hand, residential segregation by race has declined since 1970 (especially between blacks and whites, where it has always been highest) or held stable.¹²¹ On the other hand, income segregation has risen sharply since 1970, particularly during the 1980s and 2000s.¹²² Between 1970 and the early 2010s, the share of families in large metropolitan areas who lived in middle-income neighborhoods declined from 65 percent to 40 percent. Over that same time period the share of families living in poor neighborhoods rose from 19 percent to 30 percent, and those living in affluent neighborhoods rose from 17 percent to 30 percent. Economic segregation also grew in smaller metropolitan areas.¹²³

Trust

If Americans are less social with those outside their circle of friends and family, and if they are more socially and physically segregated from them, then they are also less trusting of them. Between 1972 and 2016, the share of adults who thought most people could be trusted declined from 46 percent to 31 percent.¹²⁴ Similarly, between 1974 and 2016, the number of Americans expressing a great deal or fair amount of trust in the judgment of the American people “under our democratic system about the issues facing our country” fell from 83 percent to 56 percent.¹²⁵

Americans have also become less trusting of many institutions. Between 1972 and 2012, the share of adults who said they trusted “the government in Washington to do what is right” most or all of the time declined from 53 percent to 22 percent.¹²⁶ Over the same period, trust in public office holders and candidates for office fell; the same was true of state government and of all three branches of the federal government. Trust in the federal government to handle both domestic and international policy also fell.¹²⁷

The breakdown in trust and confidence was not confined to government. Trust in the mass media’s reporting of the news also fell; between 1972 and 2016, the share of Americans saying they trusted the media a great deal or a fair amount declined from 68 percent to 32 percent.¹²⁸ Confidence in banks fell, as did confidence in newspapers, organized religion, public schools, organized labor, big business, and the medical system.¹²⁹

Despite this dramatic deterioration, there are signs that closer to home, Americans remain trusting of local institutions, and their interpersonal relationships are healthier. Trust in local government, for instance, actually rose over these years.¹³⁰ And Americans are very satisfied with their friendships. In a 2003 Gallup poll, Americans were more satisfied with their friendships than their religion and spirituality, romantic lives, health, career, money, and personal growth. They were more satisfied with their friends than with where they lived or with the recreational aspect of their lives. Only their family elicited more satisfaction.¹³¹

Civic Engagement

Civic engagement encompasses a vast array of activities, though there are few good data sources providing national data extending back to the early 1970s. The share of adults who said they had done any volunteering in the previous year is no lower today than it was in the early 1970s. One in four indicated they had volunteered in 1974 and in 2015.¹³² Among those who did any volunteering, though, Americans devoted more time in 2015. Between 1974 and 2015, the share reporting volunteering for at least 100 hours increased from 28 percent to 34 percent.¹³³ Putnam finds an increase in volunteerism between the mid-1970s and the late 1990s, driven entirely by adults under 25 and (especially) ages 60 and higher.¹³⁴ We found the increase occurred among men younger than 25 and older than 44 years old.¹³⁵

Participation in voluntary organizations, in contrast, appears to have declined. Between 1974 and 2004, the share of Americans who participated in one of sixteen kinds of voluntary associations fell from 75 percent to 62 percent.¹³⁶ Harvard political scientist Theda Skocpol has argued persuasively that

*professionally managed advocacy groups and institutions have moved to the fore, while representatively governed, nation-spanning voluntary membership federations—especially those with popular or cross-class memberships—have lost clout in national public affairs and faded from the everyday lives of most Americans.*¹³⁷

Although these more professionalized advocacy groups and organizations have found ways to sustain themselves financially, it is clear they are a less participatory form of association. Large and remote private associations, Robert Nisbet noted,

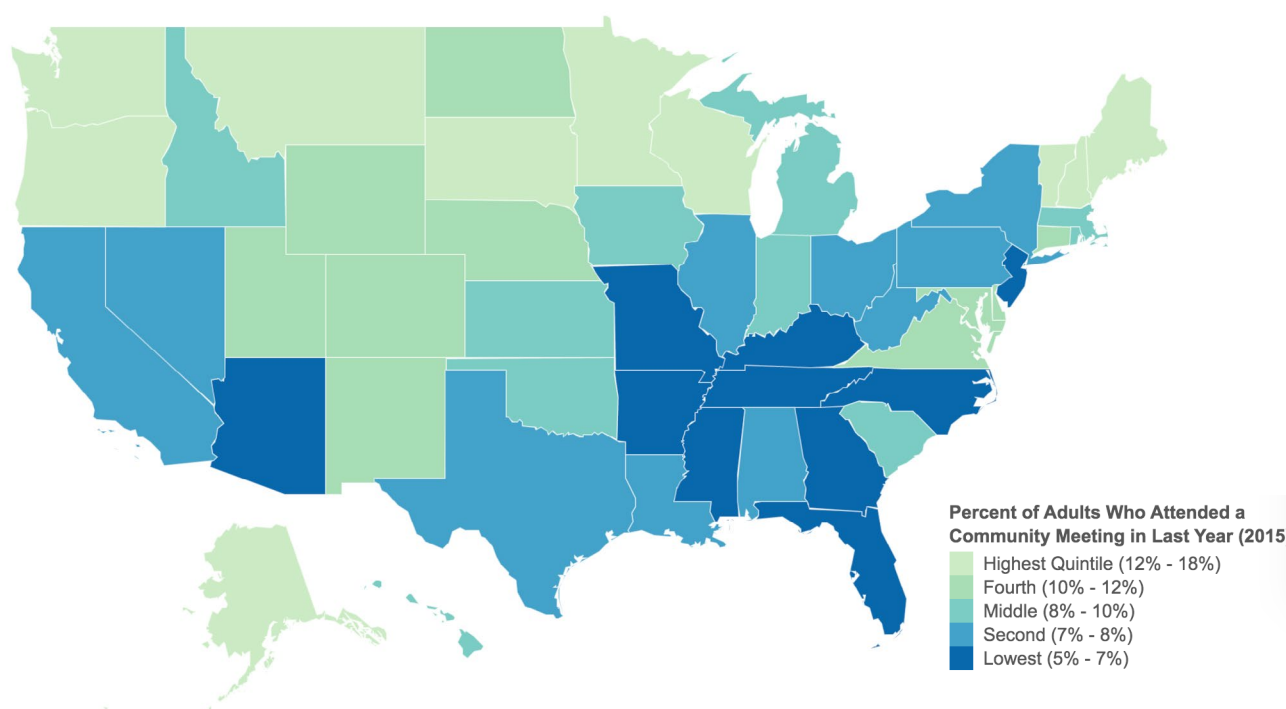
*will become as centralized and as remote as the national State itself unless these great organizations are rooted in the smaller relationships which give meaning to the ends of the large associations.*¹³⁸

Political engagement, too, has diminished over time. According to federal surveys, between 1972 and 2012, the share of the voting-age population that was registered to vote fell from 72 percent to 65 percent, and the trend was similar for the nonpresidential election years of 1974 and 2014. Correspondingly, between 1972 and 2012, voting rates fell from 63 percent to 57 percent (and fell from 1974 to 2014).¹³⁹

Fewer people attended a political meeting or rally over time as well, and fewer worked for a political party or candidate, although these activities were uncommon even in 1972.¹⁴⁰ Between 1972 and 2008, the share of people saying they follow “what’s going on in government and public affairs” declined from 36 percent to 26 percent.¹⁴¹ That said, between 1972 and 2012, the share of Americans who tried to persuade someone else to vote a particular way increased from 32 percent to 40 percent.¹⁴²

All in all, then, the domain of “community” appears to have shrunk over time. We spend less time with neighbors and in groups, both of which can involve social interaction with people we do not know well or with whom we share little in common. It is therefore unsurprising that we trust those outside our immediate circle of family and friends less than in the past, whether people in general or individuals represented by large institutions. Of course, these are exactly the relationships needed to collectively develop community, the feeling of being connected to each other and of being part of something bigger than our close personal network.

Percent of Adults Who Attended a Community Meeting in the Last Year, by State, 2015



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey, September 2015 Volunteer Supplement

WORKING TOGETHER

The centrality of work in America means that it is for many people the focus of associational life. Whether in the carpool lane, offsite at lunch, in the break room, at the holiday party, behind the counter during down times, out on business trips, or post-work at the bar or on the softball field, a significant part of our social lives is spent with our coworkers.

For some, work is simply a means to an end, but to many others it is also a source of meaning and purpose, belonging, pride, friendship, and community.¹⁴³ In 2006, over one in four workers affirmed that their “main satisfaction in life comes from

work.”¹⁴⁴ The General Social Survey asks respondents, “If you were to get enough money to live as comfortably as you would like for the rest of your life, would you continue to work or would you stop working?” In 2016, seven in ten workers—no fewer than in 1973—said they would keep working.¹⁴⁵ Similarly, 70 percent agreed that they would “enjoy having a paying job even if I did not need that money.”¹⁴⁶

Observers such as Ross Douhat have pointed out that the social features of work impart important benefits not confined to the career-minded:

*Even a grinding job tends to be an important source of social capital, providing everyday structure for people who live alone, a place to meet friends and kindle romances for people who lack other forms of community, a path away from crime and prison for young men, an example for children and a source of self-respect for parents.*¹⁴⁷

Conversely, unemployment is associated with lower levels of subjective wellbeing.¹⁴⁸

Work is inherently a cooperative and associational activity. Like family, community, and religion, work in its best form draws us out of ourselves toward the service of others and society. It depends on social norms of trust, trustworthiness, and cooperation that allow modern societies to flourish.¹⁴⁹ Workplaces rich in social capital will tend to be more effective. As Don Cohen and Laurence Prusak write:

*Social capital makes an organization, or any cooperative group, more than a collection of individuals intent on achieving their own private purposes. Social capital bridges the space between people. Its characteristic elements and indicators include high levels of trust, robust personal networks and vibrant communities, shared understandings, and a sense of equitable participation in a joint enterprise—all things that draw individuals together into a group. This kind of connection supports collaboration, commitment, ready access to knowledge and talent, and coherent organizational behavior.*¹⁵⁰

One open question is whether workplace social ties are qualitatively or quantitatively sufficient to make up for lost social ties outside of work. Putnam, for example, concludes from his evaluation of workplace connections that “the balance of evidence speaks against the hopeful hypothesis that American social capital has not disappeared but simply moved into the workplace.”¹⁵¹ For him and others, work activity is inherently utilitarian and self-interested, involving as it does customers and profit-seeking firms, bosses and employees. Many also believe, like Putnam, that job instability and insecurity has risen, undermining the creation of strong social connections on the job.

Trends in Work-Related Associational Life: Time Spent with Coworkers off the Job

There is little data available on social interaction with coworkers, on or off the job. However, time use data indicate that we are spending less time with our coworkers off the job than in the past. Between the mid-1970s (1975-76) and 2012, the average amount of time Americans between the ages of 25 and 54 spent with their coworkers outside the workplace fell from about two-and-a-half hours per week to just under one hour.¹⁵²

Time Devoted to Work and Participation in the Workforce

Time at work (or getting to work) has implications for social capital on the job and for associational life outside of work. Trend data on what we do together at work is generally unavailable, so we focus on how time spent working affects the other domains of associational life.

Median commuting times have risen, but only modestly (from 22 to 25 minutes between 1980 and 2015).¹⁵³ It is possible, too, that longer commutes reflect a tradeoff against benefits from living further away from work, such as time with family. As a share of trips or miles driven, commutes declined in importance between 1969 and 2009.¹⁵⁴ The share of workers living and working in different counties was 26 percent in 1970 and 27 percent in the second half of the 2000s (2006 to 2010).¹⁵⁵

American adults spent the same amount of time at work in 2012 as in the mid-1970s (1975-76).¹⁵⁶ This stability, however, masks a more complicated story. More adults are either in school or retired than 45 years ago. Among 25- to 54-year-olds, time at work rose 4 percent. The story was very different for men and women though.

Between the mid-1970s and 2012, hours at work rose 27 percent among women 25-54 years old.¹⁵⁷ In part that was because the share of women with any hours of work on a given day increased from 36 percent to 42 percent, but working women also spent 10 percent more time at work than they used to.

These trends reflect the final 20 years of the “quiet revolution”—the dramatic increase in work among women (particularly married women).¹⁵⁸ Just one-third of women between the ages of 25 and 54 (35 percent) were in the labor force in 1948, but that figure rose steadily through the mid-1990s.¹⁵⁹ In 2015, 74 percent of prime-working-age women were in the labor force.

A long overdue advance toward equality, the quiet revolution unavoidably shifted the mix of social relationships from the home and neighborhood to the workplace, requiring greater reliance on markets for child care. One consequence for associational life was that volunteer and community-based work previously done outside of the workforce shifted to professionalized (and paid) work in the formal economy or disappeared altogether.¹⁶⁰ One need not look longingly back

on the era to recognize that the traditional breadwinner-homemaker family underlying society until recent decades did have the advantage of creating a significant and thriving sphere for associational life outside the world of commerce and production. Women outside the paid workforce were not only homemakers, they were community-makers.

The quiet revolution did not have to be so consequential for associational life. The shift of more women spending more time in the workforce might have been met with a corresponding flow of men from paid employment into the roles of family caregiver and civic-minded neighbor. But while men have grown increasingly disconnected from work in recent decades, no such cultural shift has occurred to shore up community life. Men and women have, together and in the aggregate, prioritized individualist goals and professional pursuits over the sustenance of yesteryear's robust associational life. Between 1976 and 2015, the share of married parents with two workers rose from 54 percent to 65 percent, and the share in which both husband and wife worked full-time year-round rose from 15 percent to 36 percent.¹⁶¹

The decline in male labor force participation constitutes a second major economic shift with implications for associational life. Between 1970 and 2016, labor force participation for prime-working-age men declined from 96 percent to 89 percent.¹⁶² Among men between the ages of 25 and 54, hours at work fell by 9 percent between the mid-1970s and 2012.¹⁶³ *Employed* men spent 10 percent more time at work in 2012—the same increase as among women. But while 68 percent of working-age men spent time at work on a given day in the mid-1970s, just 56 percent did in 2012. (Note that these daily averages include weekends, which lowers them considerably.)¹⁶⁴

Work has become rarer, in particular, among men with less education. From the mid-1970s to 2012, hours at work fell by just 2 percent among men with a college degree or an advanced degree, compared with 14 percent among those with no more than a high school education.¹⁶⁵ (Even though far fewer men had, at most, a high school diploma or GED in 2012—9 percent of prime-working-age men versus 23 percent in 1975—comparing the lowest-educated 9 percent of men in both years still produces a comparably large drop in hours at work.)¹⁶⁶

For many of these men, work has disappeared as a source of social connection. A rising share of men receive disability benefits, which strongly discourage subsequent reentry into the workforce.¹⁶⁷ Between 1970 and 2010, male Social Security disability recipients (all of whom previously worked) doubled as a share of adult men.¹⁶⁸ Changes in health status associated with the aging of the population explain less than half that increase, and other changes in the workplace, health care, and health status would have predicted declines in disability receipt.¹⁶⁹

The rise in incarceration (in the wake of increasing violent crime rates) has also isolated many former offenders.¹⁷⁰ They and others passing through the criminal

justice system face barriers to work on account of their criminal records. The White House Council of Economic Advisers recently noted that, in 2008, an estimated 6.4 to 7.2 percent of the prime-age male population was formerly incarcerated, and “a potentially large fraction of this group is not participating in the workforce as a result of their incarceration.”¹⁷¹

It would be less worrisome if able-bodied, non-incarcerated men out of the labor force were spending their time engaged in other kinds of constructive activity. But convergent pieces of evidence suggest a much less optimistic picture of these “men without work.”¹⁷² Nicholas Eberstadt, relying on time-use data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other sources, points out that “[t]heir routine, instead, typically centers on watching—watching TV, DVDs, Internet, hand-held devices, etc.—and indeed watching for an average of 2,000 hours a year, as if it were a full-time job.”¹⁷³ A recent working paper by Mark Aguiar, Mark Bilts, Kerwin Charles, and Erik Hurst suggests that among young men (age 21-30) the recent decline in their work hours has been matched by an increase in leisure, about three-quarters of which is taken up by video games.¹⁷⁴

The concern is that, in Eberstadt’s words,

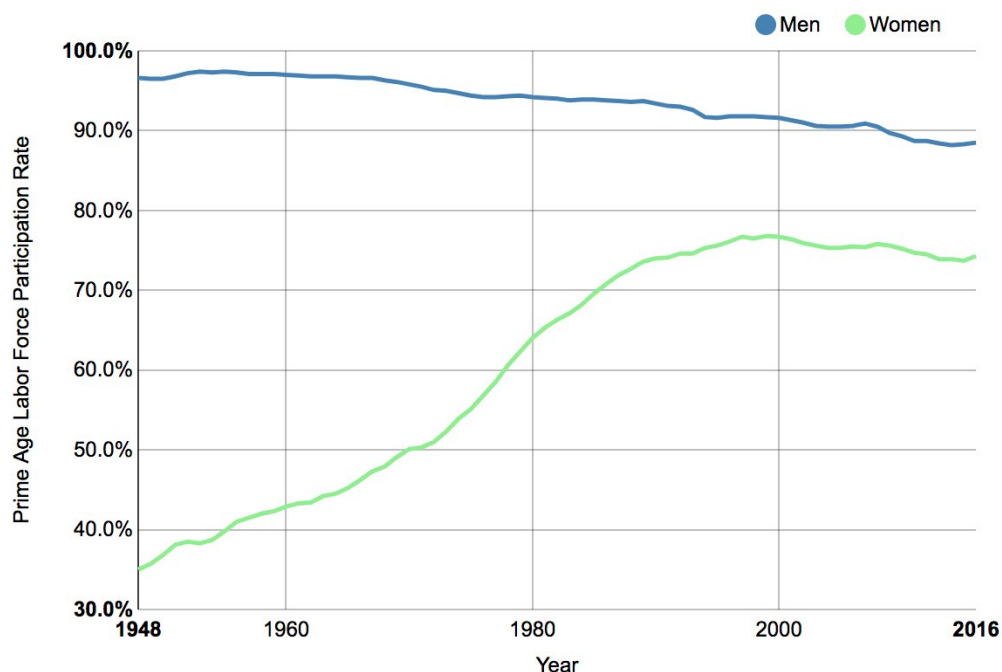
*The death of work has ushered in additional costs at the personal and social levels that may be difficult to quantify but are easy to describe. These include the corrosive effects of prolonged idleness on personality and behavior, the loss of self-esteem and the respect of others that may attend a man’s voluntary loss of economic independence, and the loss of meaning and fulfillment that work demonstrably brings to so many...*¹⁷⁵

Given the exploding opioid crisis gripping the nation, Eberstadt’s fears seem especially relevant.¹⁷⁶ The research of economist Alan Krueger, for instance, indicates that nearly one out of three prime-age men out of the labor force report having taken prescription pain medication on the previous day.¹⁷⁷

Job Instability

Putnam advances the conventional view that the labor market has changed dramatically over time and is characterized by heightened job insecurity and instability.¹⁷⁸ These changes are claimed to have limited the development of on-the-job social capital, since fewer workers are at the same workplace for extended periods of time and they are anxious while there. “Alternative work arrangements”—temp jobs, independent contracting, the “gig economy,” and the like—have become more common, for example. Reliable data are unavailable back to the 1970s, but between 1995 and 2015, workers in these arrangements grew from 9 percent to 16 percent of the workforce.¹⁷⁹ Between the mid-1970s and 2012, the percentage of employed Americans who worked from home on a typical day and spent no time at the workplace increased from 3 percent to 7 percent.¹⁸⁰

Labor Force Participation Rate, Men and Women Age 25-54, 1948-2016



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Current Population Survey. Authors' tabulations using the data tools at <http://www.bls.gov/cps/>.

But on a number of other dimensions, the labor market has changed less than is generally believed or has changed in ways that have increased time at work.¹⁸¹ Part-time work, for instance, remains near its 1970 level, not substantially higher. Between that year and 2015, the share of employed men usually working part-time rose from 9 percent to just 12 percent, and the share of working women doing so fell from 26 percent to 25 percent.¹⁸² Meanwhile, the share of the employed working year-round actually rose from 69 to 81 percent among men and from 49 to 76 percent among women.¹⁸³ Since 2004, median job tenure has been higher than its 1973 level, indicating that workers are staying in their jobs longer than in the past.¹⁸⁴ Even the drop in prime-working-age male labor force participation primarily reflects an increase in men who tell federal surveyors they do not want a job.¹⁸⁵

Organized Labor

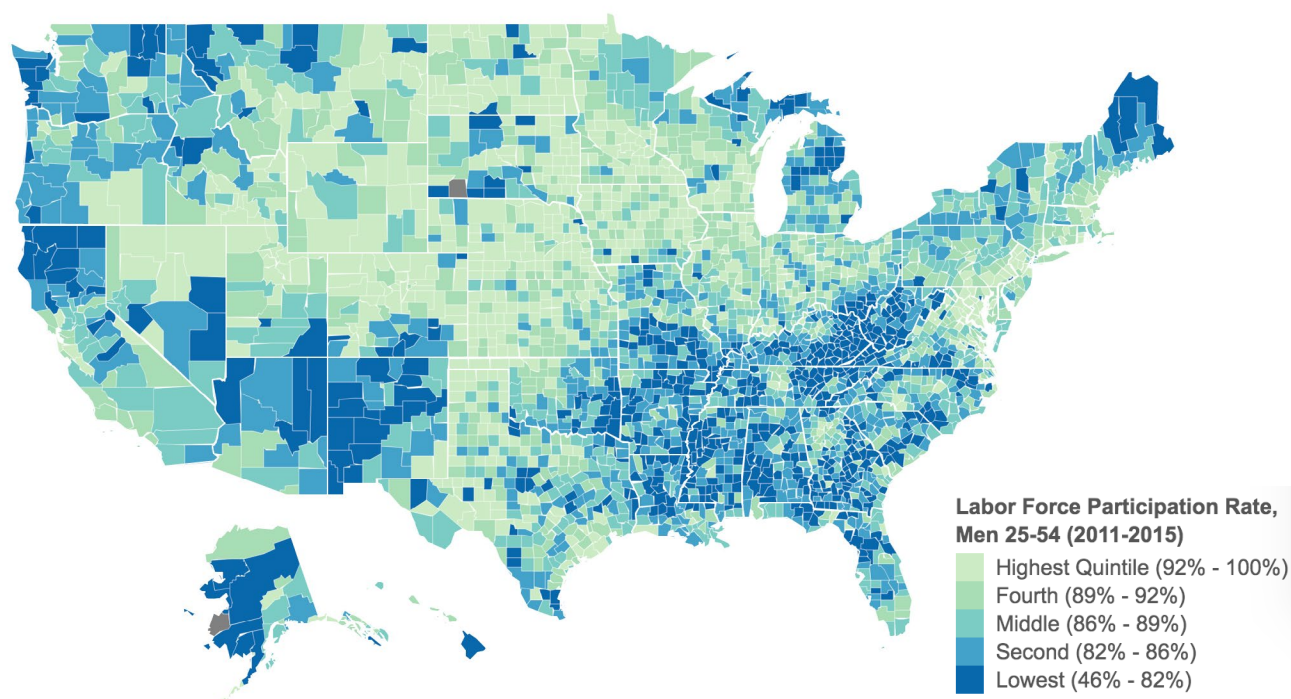
Labor unions were once a primary source of association in work life—a focal point for community, camaraderie, and civic participation during the twentieth century.¹⁸⁶ But between 1970 and 2015, union membership declined from about 27 percent to 11 percent of all wage and salary workers.¹⁸⁷ There is little agreement about why this decline occurred, but consistent with falling participation in a range of voluntary associations, one study concluded that a large part of the

drop in union membership between 1977 and 1991 reflected declining interest in joining.¹⁸⁸

It is noteworthy that at the same time that union membership has declined, formal occupational licensing rules have been steadily on the rise.¹⁸⁹ Between 1965 and 2010, the percent of the workforce with some form of license or formal certification increased from less than 10 percent to nearly 25 percent.¹⁹⁰ While formalized licensing and certification regimes may substitute (for good and ill) for many of the benefits to specific workers previously achieved through unionization, it does so in a much less associative way.

While data on associational life in the workplace is hard to come by, it appears that we spend less time off the job with our coworkers than in the past. There has been a surprising amount of stability over the past 45 years in features of the workforce and the economy that would be expected to affect social capital. The giant exception involves the changes in labor force participation among men and women, between whom the longer-term trends move in opposite directions. These shifts have profoundly affected what we do together, outside of work and presumably inside the workplace too.

Prime-Age Male Labor Force Participation Rate, by County, 2011-2015



Source: U.S. Census Bureau, 2011-2015 American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates

CONCLUSION

Our review of changes in associational life over the past several decades suggests that in many—but not all—ways, what we do together has become more circumscribed than it used to be.

The Social Capital Project will explore some of these worrisome trends in the years to come, as well as seek to understand geographic variation in the health of associational life, such as that displayed in the maps embedded in this report. We also intend to analyze what promotes or impedes social capital formation (e.g., cultural values, economic changes, or segregation), as well as the possible effects of a healthy associational life (e.g., on economic mobility). The project will assess some of the day's most important policy issues that are related to the presence or absence of social capital, including declining male labor force participation, family formation, and rising “deaths of despair.”¹⁹¹ And we will highlight other trends and patterns that are underappreciated and relevant for policy.

As for this report, a few big-picture conclusions regarding trends in associational life are in order. To the extent that there was a golden age of associational life in the mid-twentieth century, the sense of loss we feel seems inextricably linked to the growth of two-worker families on the one hand and single-parent families on the other.

The typical child today will not make it to 16 without experiencing single parenthood. Less acknowledged in policy debates, the adults in fragile families also suffer when their relationship deteriorates. With fewer children in intact families, fewer adults in stable long-term relationships, and less-happy marriages than in the past, it is no wonder that Americans are nostalgic for a time—perhaps idealized—when family life was healthier.

Meanwhile, the increase in dual-income families has sometimes strained family life (even as it has improved purchasing power), and it has depleted the social capital of neighborhoods and communities. Working families today often complain of a “time crunch”—a generally unavoidable conflict between the demands of work life and of family. But the increasingly central pursuit of material ends and professional goals has crowded out the demands of a robust community life no less than those of family life.

This is not to say that the shift to two-worker families has not come with benefits. In addition to the higher material standard of living it has brought, women now enjoy more economic freedom than they did in years past. It may be that for most people, the benefits of this fundamental shift outweigh the costs. Nor should we conclude that working women are to blame for declines in social capital; there is no reason that men could not have replenished the lost investment in family and community life that resulted from the “quiet revolution.” We should acknowledge, however, that spending more time on work and giving more attention to career has come with tradeoffs.

Importantly, the increases in dual-income and single-parent families reflect the rising affluence of our nation, not growing hardship. Sending a second earner into the workforce entails costs—less time available for home maintenance, childrearing, and meal preparation, and expenses for work-related needs such as childcare or a second car. Technological innovation reduced the amount of time it took to maintain homes and prepare meals, and rising incomes allowed families to incur work-related expenses. The increase in work among married women was steady, and its start predated by two decades the stagnation in men's pay that began in the 1970s.¹⁹² It was a phenomenon common to developed nations around the world and co-occurred with rising educational attainment among women, delayed marriage, and reduced and delayed fertility.¹⁹³

Even the growth in single parenthood reflects rising affluence. More women are able to support children on their own (with or without child support) than in the past, due to their increased earnings. So too, the public safety net for single parents, while by no means allowing a lavish existence, is sufficiently generous to facilitate single parenthood. Whatever one's feelings about the proper size of the safety net, it is clearly more extensive than it was 50 years ago.

And despite common claims that the increase in single motherhood lower down the income ladder reflects a decline in "marriageable men," men's pay—properly measured—has stagnated at historical highs or even risen a bit, not declined.¹⁹⁴ What has changed is that the gap between what men and women earn has narrowed greatly.¹⁹⁵ Indeed, the causality may run in the other direction—men may be less attached to the labor force because we expect them to contribute less to raising children than in the past.

More generally, rising affluence has made social capital investment less necessary than in the past. In the same way that single parents need a spouse less than they would have 50 years ago, we are rich enough that we need less material support from our extended families and neighbors. Investing in social capital always entailed costs—favors owed, personal awkwardness tolerated, privacy lost. As we have grown richer, we have turned increasingly to formal market transactions to meet our various needs. Instead of calling on the neighborhood handyman, we hire a contractor.

Similarly, our willingness to endure the constraints imposed by organized religion has also eroded with affluence. (A profound irony of our affluent society's diminished need for constraining commitments to associational life is that it is among the best-off segments of society where these commitments remain strongest. Religious adherence and family stability, for instance, have deteriorated less among upper-educated Americans than among the lower-educated.)

As a consequence of rising affluence, our associational life has contracted. We are increasingly focused on work and professional goals and on our circles of family and friends. Technology allows us to maintain stronger ties with the people most important to us, whether they be near or far, than with the couple who lives across the hall of our apartment building.

But our turn toward the private has come with costs. We no longer relate to each other so easily beyond our inner circles.¹⁹⁶ The connective tissue that facilitates cooperation has eroded, leaving us less equipped to solve problems together within our communities. So, too, are we less able to collaborate across communities. Instead of solving problems locally, we increasingly turn to the federal government—an approach that puts problem-solving in the hands of policymakers with little local knowledge of community problems and that leads to polarized (and polarizing) laws that offend the values of large swaths of the populace.

We may be materially richer than in the past. But with atrophied social capabilities, with a diminished sense of belonging to something greater than ourselves, and with less security in our family life, we are much poorer for doing less together.

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9. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
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 16. Robert Putnam, *Bowling Alone*. Also, as Harvard political scientist Theda Skocpol argues, our civic life has undergone an enormous shift from "doing with" to "doing for," in which "[p]rofessionally managed, top-down civic endeavors simultaneously limit the mobilization of most citizens into public life and encourage a fragmentation of social identities and trivial polarizations in public debates." See Theda Skocpol, *Diminished Democracy: From Membership to Management in American Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2003), 232.
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 18. "Public Trust in Government: 1958-2015," Pew Research Center, November 23, 2015, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.people-press.org/2015/11/23/public-trust-in-government-1958-2015/>. Starting around 1980, partisans report higher levels of trust when a president is in power who is of the same party (e.g., Republicans reported much higher rates of trust in the federal government when Reagan was president, and Democrats report much higher rates of trust when Obama was president; overall, trust rates have still markedly declined).
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 22. Nisbet, *The Quest for Community*, 64.
 23. Peter L. Berger and Richard John Neuhaus, *To Empower People: From State to Civil Society*, ed. Michael Novak (Washington, DC: The AEI Press, 1996), accessed May 1, 2017, https://www.aei.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/-to-empower-people_140638228440.pdf.
 24. Unfortunately for our project, "mediating structures" is today not as wildly popular a term as Peter Berger believed it to be. He stated, perhaps overzealously, "Soon, the term itself, mediating structures, became a household word, frequently cited without quotation marks and without reference to our little book. We did not complain, indeed, felt flattered. It is, after all, gratifying if a word one has coined comes into usage as a common noun—like *coke*, or *xeroxing*, or *fridge*." See Berger and Neuhaus, *To Empower People*, 148.
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42. David Brooks, “The Death of Idealism,” *New York Times*, September 30, 2016, A27, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/30/opinion/the-death-of-idealism.html>.
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44. For an excellent recent treatment of this way of thinking, see Jim Manzi, *Uncontrolled: The Surprising Payoff of Trial-and-Error for Business, Politics, and Society* (New York: Basic Books, 2012).
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46. Shawn Grover and John F. Helliwell, “How’s Life at Home? New Evidence on Marriage and the Set Point for Happiness,” (Working Paper No. 20794, National Bureau of Economic Research, 2014), accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w20794>.
47. Ibid.
48. There are two fundamental challenges that are rarely adequately addressed in the literature. First, researchers must account for alternative potential factors that may affect outcomes and that differ between married and single adults. Perhaps depressed people are less likely to marry, so the fact that married people are happier might just reflect the fact that they would have been happier than those who stayed single regardless of who did and did not marry. Second, researchers must account for self-selection into marital status. Studies rarely assess, for instance, the effect of divorce on children after holding constant levels of couple hostility with each other. Doing so might reveal that children of low-hostility couples do better if their parents stay married, while children of high-hostility couples do better if their parents divorce. So “marriage” would be beneficial for the former but harmful for the latter. Even more problematic, if most couples with high hostility toward each other divorce, while most couples with low hostility do not, then it is unclear how to even compare the children of married and divorced parents (holding constant levels of hostility) given a survey that includes both. An apples-to-apples comparison may not be possible.
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50. Linda Datcher Loury, "All in the Extended Family: Effects of Grandparents, Aunts, and Uncles on Educational Attainment," *American Economic Review*, 96, no. 2 (2006): 275-278.
51. Janice Compton and Robert A. Pollak, "Family proximity, childcare, and women's labor force attachment," *Journal of Urban Economics* 79(2013), 72-90, find that 90 percent of household heads in 1988 who lived in the state where they "grew up" had a mother living in the same state. Moreover, a majority of adults living in their childhood state lived within ten miles of their mother, and 85 percent lived within 100 miles. In contrast, barely a quarter of household heads who did not live in the state where they grew up lived in the same state as their mother, and 70 percent lived more than 100 miles from their mother.
52. These estimates come from the 1% metro sample of the 1970 decennial census and from the 2015 American Community Survey, both accessed via the IPUMS-USA website. See Steven Ruggles, et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series: Version 6.0* [Machine-readable database], (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 2015), accessed May 1, 2017, <http://doi.org/10.18128/D010.V6.0>; Scott Winship finds that the share of native-born Americans age 30 to 39 who lived in their birth state peaked in the 1930s or 1940s and was stable from 1970 to 2010 in "When Moving Matters: Residential and Economic Mobility Trends in America, 1880-2010," *economics21 Policy Report No. 2*, November 2015, Figure 41, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.manhattan-institute.org/html/when-moving-matters-residential-and-economic-mobility-trends-america-1880-2010-8048.html>.
53. "Spend evening with relatives," General Social Survey, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/variables/521/vshow>.
54. The 1975 figure is from the U.S. Census Bureau, "Current Population Survey, February 1975," Arrangements Made for the Daytime Care of Children 3 to 6 Years Old by Race, Age of Child, and Labor Force Status of Mother: February 1975, table 2, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www2.census.gov/library/publications/1976/demo/p20-298/tab-02.pdf>. The 2011 upper bound is from the U.S. Census Bureau, "Who's Minding the Kids? Child Care Arrangements: 2011 – Detailed Tables," Employment Status of Mother and Selected Characteristics, table 1B, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/2008/demo/2011-tables.html>. It is an upper bound because respondents to the survey could indicate more than one child care arrangement. The estimate divides the sum of (1) children of employed mothers cared for by her or the other parent, (2) children of non-employed mothers cared for by her or the other parent, and (3) children of non-employed mothers with no child care arrangements who are not in school or in self-care by the number of three- and four-year-olds. The 2011 lower bound is from the National Center for Education Statistics, "National Household Education Surveys Program," Percentage of children from birth through age 5 and not yet in kindergarten participating in various weekly nonparental care arrangements, by child and family characteristics: 2012, accessed May 1, 2017, https://nces.ed.gov/nhes/tables/nonrelative_care.asp. It represents the share of children ages three to five (and not in kindergarten) who have no non-parental arrangement in which they receive child care at least once a week.
55. Giulia M. Dotti Sani and Judith Treas, "Educational Gradients in Parents' Child-Care Time Across Countries, 1965-2012," *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78 no. 4 (2016); Suzanne M. Bianchi, John P. Robinson, and Melissa A. Milkie, *Changing Rhythms of American Family Life* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006).
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57. Claude S. Fischer, *Still Connected: Family and Friends in America Since 1970* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2011); Putnam, *Bowling Alone*.
58. Ibid.
59. U.S. Census Bureau, "Living Arrangements of Adults 18 and Over, 1967 to Present," Historical

Living Arrangements of Adults Table AD-3, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/adults.html>; U.S. Census Bureau, “Unmarried Couples of the Opposite Sex, by Presence of Children: 1960 to present,” Historical Living Arrangements of Adults Table UC-1, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://www.census.gov/data/tables/time-series/demo/families/adults.html>. These estimates add the share living with a spouse, with a parent, or with other relatives from table AD-3. They then apply the percentage of cohabiters with children (from table UC-1) to the share of adults living with a cohabiter (from table AD-3) and add that in as well.

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63. Estimates are from the 1970 decennial census and the 2015 American Community Survey, analyzed using Steven Ruggles, et al., *Integrated Public Use Microdata Series*. Version 6.0.
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93. The membership estimate is for 2016 and from Gallup (see "Religion," Gallup, In Depth: Topics A to Z, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/1690/religion.aspx>). Attendance figures are from the General Social Survey (44 percent in 2016) and the American National Election Studies (42 percent in 2012). See the previous note for sources.
Using the estimates presented in Lyman Stone, "The Beginning for the American Church," *In a State of Migration*, Medium, April 21, 2017, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://medium.com/migration-issues/the-beginning-for-the-american-church-6bb5654a91fc>, and dividing by population estimates indicates a drop in religious membership from 66 percent in 1973 to 60 percent in 2015. Stone adjusts data from the Association of Religion Data Archives using various sources and interpolations.
94. Roughly, religious adherence, as reported by churches and congregations, declined from around 60 percent to around 50 percent between the early 1970s and 2010 (compared with a drop in church membership from 71 to 61 percent in the Gallup data from 1975 to 2010). The religious adherence data were downloaded from "Churches and Church Membership in the United States, 1971 (States)," Association of Religion Data Archives, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/CMS71ST.asp>, and "U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations and Membership Study, 2010 (State File)," Association of Religious Data Archives, accessed May 1, 2017, <http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Descriptions/RCMSST10.asp>. Data for 1971-73 were originally collected by Glenmary Research Center in Washington, DC. (D.W. Johnson, P. Picard, and Bernard Quinn, "Churches and Church Membership in the United States," *Glenmary Research Center*, 1974.) Data for 2009-11 are from a survey administered by the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, with the data collection carried out by the Church of the Nazarene Global Ministry Center in Lenexa, Kansas. (Grammich et al., "2010 U.S. Religion Census: Religious Congregations & Membership Study," *Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies*, 2012.) In the 1971-73 data, each denomination defined "total adherents" and "communicant, confirmed or full members" as they saw fit. Where adherents were not reported, Glenmary Research Center multiplied communicants by the ratio of the county population to the county population over age 13. In the 2009-11 data, denominations were instructed to identify adherents as "all members, including full members, their children and the estimated number of other participants who are not considered members; for example, the 'baptized,' 'those not confirmed,' 'those not eligible for Communion,' 'those regularly attending services,' and the like." Some denominations provided membership estimates and suggestions for converting to adherents. In other cases, ASARB converted them using the same approach used by Glenmary Research Center.
The 2009-11 survey was more inclusive than past efforts, including special efforts to reach out to "independent or non-denominational churches, Jewish synagogues, historically African American churches, Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims." In order to produce comparable estimates for 1971-73 and 2009-11, therefore, it was necessary to restrict the denominations included in the two surveys so that any trend would not reflect more complete data collection in the more recent wave. Otherwise, the adherence trend estimated would be biased upward. At the same time, restricting the trend analysis to denominations present in both waves would result in the exclusion of churches and congregations formed after the early 1970s and would tend to bias the trend downward.
The strategy we used was to first exclude Washington, DC adherents from the 2009-11 data, as they were not included in 1971-73. Next, we identified all denominations with adherents in both waves. We then added any denomination with adherents that existed in 1971-73 but

was consistently absent from waves in 1980, 1990, 2000, and 2010, under the assumption that such denominations either were folded into other ones or ceased to exist. Next, we added adherents from any denomination that (1) existed in 2009-11, (2) was present in a preceding wave, but if so (3) was present continuously in all waves while it was in any of them. The assumption here is that these were denominations that originated after 1971-73. This strategy excluded denominations appearing in the 2010 wave for the first time, some of which may have formed between 2000 and 2010.

We also added a number of Mennonite, Amish, and Friends denominations from 2009-11 that had no match in 1971-73 because they appear to just reflect a finer grouping of the same kind of adherents as were recorded in the past. Finally, we added adherents from “non-denominational Christian Churches,” which were included in the data for the first time in 2009-11. Their omission from earlier waves may bias the trend in adherence upward, but excluding them risked missing a quickly growing segment of the religious landscape. Unfortunately, there were no estimates of Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, or Hindu adherents in the 1971-73 data, so we exclude them from the 2009-11 data as well. Further, there are no estimates for the major African American churches in 1971-73, so they too are excluded from 2009-11. (The 2009-11 figures for black churches are badly under-estimated regardless.) We then adjusted the denominators in our rate estimates to exclude African Americans and Jews, which changed the 50-percent-to-44-percent decline to a 58-percent-to-52-percent decline. There is little reason to think that the trend in adherence would differ if adherents from the excluded denominations were available.

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97. W. Bradford Wilcox et al., “No Money, No Honey, No Church: The Deinstitutionalization of Religious Life Among the White Working Class,” in *Religion, Work and Inequality*, ed. Lisa A. Keister, John McCarthy, and Roger Finke, vol. 23 of *Research in the Sociology of Work* (Emerald Group Publishing Limited, 2012), 227-250; Murray, *Coming Apart*.
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99. The 65-to-41 percent drop is from Gallup (“Religion,” In Depth: Topics A to Z). The 36-to-20 percent drop is from the General Social Survey (“Confidence in organized religion,” General Social Survey, accessed May 1, 2017, <https://gssdataexplorer.norc.umd.edu/variables/450/vshow>).
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101. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 489.
102. Scrivens and Smith, “Four Interpretations.”
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109. Ibid., 304.
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