

# Book Review

April 2015

## ***Bowling Alone:***

### **The Collapse and Revival of American Community**

Robert D. Putnam, Simon & Schuster, 2000.

### Summary

Nearly 15 years after publication, *Bowling Alone* still stands as the seminal work of the socialization of American twentieth century society; establishing the idea of social capital and putting sociology and sociological issues back in the realm of community planning.

Professor Putnam has extensively surveyed and analyzed participation rates in clubs, organizations, leagues and volunteer activities over the twentieth century. He has concluded that the tradition of community participation and group activities was strong until mid-century; tapering to near disappearance by the current century's turn.

The value of Professor Putnam's book is not diminished by its age or its pre-dating the social media explosion. His work points to the importance of social interaction and the need to use the tools we have, including the design of physical places and spaces, to create the opportunity for social capital to grow and prosper.

### Implications for the American City

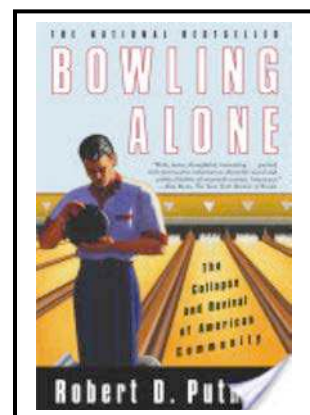
*Bowling Alone* defines the phenomenon of social capital and offers metrics to evaluate its condition. The implications for the American city are many. Trust in government is at an all-time low. Voting rates are down. Yet the use of social media grows and 24-hour news commentary thrives.

Community prosperity depends on participation. Democracy is best served by an active electorate. The use of standard techniques like workshops, newsletters, public hearings and meetings are important venues for discussing community issues. Social media offers new ways to both send and receive information and ideas from the citizenry.

[Summary](#)  
[Implications](#)  
[YouTube](#)  
[Published Reviews](#)



Robert D. Putnam (2006)  
Wikipedia



## Book Review

April 2015

Professor Putnam’s distinction between “bonding” and “bridging” social connections is particularly relevant in the early twenty-first century world of “haves and have nots”, selective news coverage based on ideology and the generally rancorous demeanor found at many public meetings. City government’s attention to enabling people of like minds and interests to “bond” while encouraging diverse groups to “bridge” their differences should be an activity of the first order.

The most important result of *Bowling Alone*’s success is that community sociability and civility is becoming of equal importance to a city’s economic development and physical development. In general, the social aspect of the city’s planning has been neglected, relegated to the NGOs, the volunteer organizations and to individuals. *Bowling Alone* demonstrates that public policy and actions affect community sociability, for the better or the worse. Concerted action can improve the opportunity for every town to be pleasant and prosperous. The city’s General Plan must have three main elements: Economic Development, Physical Development and now, Social Infrastructure Development.

---

**YouTube:** In addition to the reviews cited below, check out:

### Robert Putnam - Manchester [1/5]

**Uploaded on Sep 24, 2010**

Putnam’s talk was at a day conference on Social Capital and Community Cohesion in Manchester, held on 16th October 2007, Manchester Metropolitan University

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4uP6A7XFytQ>

---

### Published Reviews

## About The Book

**Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community**

**by Robert D. Putnam**

(New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000). In a groundbreaking book based on vast data, Putnam shows how we have become increasingly disconnected from family, friends, neighbors, and our democratic structures– and how we may reconnect.

Putnam warns that our stock of social capital – the very fabric of our connections with each other, has plummeted, impoverishing our lives and communities.

<http://bowlingalone.com/>

## Book Review

April 2015

# Books

The New York Times  
ON THE WEB

Home

Site Index

Site Search

Forums

Archives

Marketplace

### CHAPTER ONE



## Bowling Alone

The Collapse and Revival of American Community

By ROBERT D. PUTNAM

Simon & Schuster

■ [Read the Review](#)

---

## Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community

[Robert D. Putnam](#)

Simon and Schuster, Aug 7, 2001 - [History](#) - 541 pages

[160 Reviews](#)

Drawing on vast new data that reveal Americans' changing behavior, Putnam shows how we have become increasingly disconnected from one another and how social structures—whether they be PTA, church, or political parties—have disintegrated. Until the publication of this groundbreaking work, no one had so deftly diagnosed the harm that these broken bonds have wreaked on our physical and civic health, nor had anyone exalted their fundamental power in creating a society that is happy, healthy, and safe.

Like defining works from the past, such as *The Lonely Crowd* and *The Affluent Society*, and like the works of C. Wright Mills and Betty Friedan, Putnam's *Bowling Alone* has identified a central crisis at the heart of our society and suggests what we can do.

More »

[http://books.google.com/books/about/Bowling\\_Alone.html?id=rd2ibodep7UC](http://books.google.com/books/about/Bowling_Alone.html?id=rd2ibodep7UC)

### REVIEWER:

Bill Kercher, AICP, LEED®AP, wck | [planning, inc.](#), Orlando FL 32801

[bill.kercher@wckplanning.com](mailto:bill.kercher@wckplanning.com)