

Chapter 6 COMMUNITY

Americans have long adhered to a strong belief in individualism and self-reliance. But this ethic is accompanied by a conviction that we share responsibility for each other and our communities, just as we are responsible for ourselves. Furthermore, we recognize that the strength of our people and our nation depends on the vibrancy and cohesiveness of our diverse communities. Social capital--the degree of trust, cohesiveness, reciprocity, and feelings of collective empowerment among community residents--is therefore an important indicator of community and national strength. But also important to this assessment are measures of Americans' attitudes toward newcomers and diverse groups, and of the policies that the nation adopts in response to their needs. Finally, evaluating community strength also requires assessing how the nation responds to diversity. Perhaps the most sensitive measure of diversity is the degree of residential segregation of diverse groups. We assess these dimensions of community in this chapter, the major findings of which are presented in Box 6.

Box 6: Has the Nation Protected and Enhanced Community?

Major Gains in Community

- Americans' attitudes toward racial and ethnic minorities and the value of racial equality have improved significantly over the last several decades.

Areas of Limited, Mixed, or No Progress

- Rates of residential segregation on the basis of race, ethnicity, and income have declined in the 1990s, but many disenfranchised groups, particularly poor African Americans and Hispanics, female-headed households, and immigrants, remain more likely than poor whites to live in high-poverty neighborhoods.

Areas Where Community Has Declined

- Social capital has declined in many communities, as Americans are less involved in civic, community, and other volunteer activities.
- Anti-immigrant policies enacted in recent years have decreased immigrants' access to social, health, and education programs, and immigrant integration programs have not kept pace with need.

A strong and cohesive sense of community is essential to expanding opportunity for all. When we care about the progress of all members of our society, opportunity is no longer just about personal success but also about our success as a people. This ideal is embodied in the motto *E Pluribus Unum*--"from many one"--that John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, and Thomas Jefferson proposed for the first Great Seal of the United States in 1776. It symbolizes both the American resolve to form one nation from a collection of states, and our determination to forge one unified country from people of different backgrounds and beliefs. Our enduring national commitment to seeking unity while respecting diversity is crucial to our progress as a nation.

The interdependence of community and opportunity is also expressed by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which states that "everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible." It is only

through our relationships with other members of society that we can achieve our own aspirations and protect our own rights. This is the notion of mutuality or “the interrelatedness of all communities and states” described by Martin Luther King, Jr., and the idea that “whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly” and that “injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.” Indeed, it is a central teaching of virtually all of the world’s major religions, expressed most familiarly in Western culture as “love thy neighbor as thyself.”

The value of community goes beyond the notion of assimilation, which usually means expecting newcomers to adapt to the dominant culture and give up their own. Instead, community embraces mutual respect, diversity, and integration, which mean learning from each other’s experiences and beliefs to build a common and evolving national character. As people who came here from other lands--some as immigrants, some in chains, and some as the first indigenous settlers of untamed wilderness--we are committed to welcoming new generations as a personal and political expression of community.

We all benefit in different ways from being Americans, and we all must contribute our fair share to the larger society as well as to our own pursuit of happiness. That sometimes means that those of us who have benefited most from being part of the American venture must give back the most, sharing our national prosperity with those who have benefited the least. It means willingly sharing the risks, burdens, and advantages of making America work. It also means remembering that our national embrace of human rights and fundamental freedoms is based not on hostility toward government but on hostility toward the excesses of government. And that there are certain things--from public transportation to national defense, from protecting human rights to providing health care for all--that we cannot do on our own as individuals or as individual cities, states, or corporations.

Finally, community comprises the connections, rights, and responsibilities that we have as world citizens and as members of the world’s most powerful nation. Those ties obligate us to search for solutions that move us forward together rather than pitting us against one another. If, as the Universal Declaration states, “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world,” it is incumbent upon us always to seek common ground.

About the Data in this Chapter

This chapter examines four aspects of community that are essential to opportunity: social capital, or the degree to which members of a community share feelings of reciprocity, trust, and cohesiveness; national policies on immigrant integration; Americans’ attitudes about racial and ethnic minorities and the value of diversity; and the degree of residential integration/segregation across racial, ethnic, income, and national origin groups.

Many measures of social capital such as the Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey provide detailed data on levels of general social trust, interracial trust, civic and faith-based engagement, informal social ties, volunteerism, and other dimensions of social capital. The Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey comprises both a national sample of 3,000 respondents and an additional 26,700 community respondents in 41 communities nationwide across 29 states. Initiated in 2000, the survey does not provide data on trends over time. We therefore supplement this assessment with national trend data from the National Election Studies survey from the University of Michigan (to assess trends in attitudes toward government), the General Social Survey conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, and data from Independent Sector reports that assess national levels of volunteerism and giving.

Our assessments of attitudes about racial and ethnic minorities and the value of diversity and of immigrant integration policies are guided by a review of relevant literature. Finally, we examine trends in residential segregation through a literature review and original data analyses performed specifically for this report.

Social Capital

Policymakers, community leaders, researchers, and the business community are increasingly recognizing the importance of social capital to the economic and social health and well-being of groups ranging from small communities to large nations. Research on social capital has found associations between the strength of informal networks and the success of organizations, the safety of neighborhoods, and the health of individuals and whole communities. For example, research has found an association between social capital and levels of crime and violence in communities. Communities that have fewer informal social ties and lower levels of trust and cohesion also face higher rates of serious and violent crime.¹ “Bonding” social capital may emerge from networks of people who share common interests and backgrounds, while “bridging” social capital encompasses more diverse groups and individuals. Both types of social capital are essential, but bridging social capital is harder to create and presents different challenges. In an increasingly diverse society, however, social networks that bridge the various splits in contemporary communities are critically important.²

The measurement and interpretation of trends in social capital are controversial, but research indicates that Americans are less involved in some types of volunteer and community activities than they were a generation ago.³ For example, rates of participation in clubs and civic organizations have declined by half over the last twenty-five years, and involvement in public meetings has declined by over one-third during the same period.⁴

However, some aspects of social capital such as rates of volunteerism and charitable giving may have improved in recent years. These dimensions are influenced by economic conditions. For example, the economic recession of the early 2000s suppressed some aspects of charitable giving. But events such as the December 2004 tsunami in the Indian Ocean and 2005 hurricanes in the U.S. Gulf Coast region may have spurred recent

charitable giving. U.S. charitable giving reached a record in 2004 of nearly \$250 billion, including nearly \$188 billion from individuals.⁵ And according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), rates of volunteerism in the United States increased from 27.4 percent in 2002 to 29 percent in 2004.⁶

Independent Sector, a nonprofit, nonpartisan coalition of more than 700 national organizations, foundations, and corporate philanthropy programs, conducts regular surveys of charitable giving and volunteering in the United States. Using a different survey and methodology than the federal Current Population Survey (on which BLS data cited above are based), Independent Sector finds much higher rates of volunteering than does the BLS. In 2000, 44 percent of adults over age 21 were found to volunteer with a formal organization, with 63 percent of these individuals lending time on a regular basis (monthly or more often). Independent Sector's biennial national survey is not completely comparable over time due to changes in survey methodology, but it suggests that rates of volunteering have declined slightly since 1989 (see Figure 6-1).⁷

Figure 6-1. Volunteers as a Percentage of Population, 1989-2000

Source: Independent Sector, 2 002



The 2000 Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey does not provide data on trends over time, but that year found generally low levels of community engagement and trust, particularly in institutions such as government and the media. For example, fewer than half (47 percent) of respondents felt that “most people can be trusted.” Whites (54 percent) were more than twice as likely as African Americans (27 percent) or Hispanics (23 percent) to endorse this view. Twenty percent of respondents reported participating in a neighborhood association, and only 9 percent reported participating in a political group. Only 14 percent of respondents stated that they trust their local news media “a

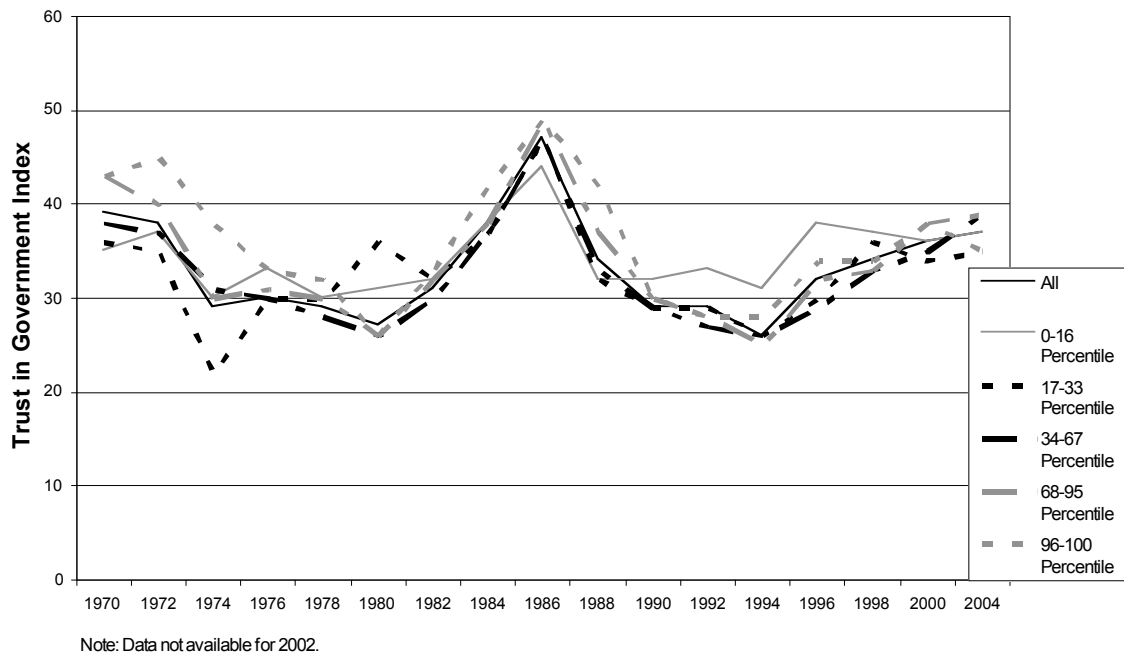
lot.” And only 28 percent of respondents stated that they trust the federal government “just about always” or “most of the time,” while only 43 percent reported that they trust their local government “just about always” or “most of the time.” On the other hand, a large majority of survey respondents felt a strong sense of community in their neighborhoods, places of worship, schools, and workplaces. Eight in 10 respondents felt that people in their neighborhood gave them a sense of community, a response rate that does not vary greatly on the basis of respondent race, ethnicity, or education level.⁸

The National Election Studies (NES) survey, conducted since 1948, provides trend data on a range of measures including trust of government. NES’s measure of trust in government is a composite index constructed from response data to the following questions:

- How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right--just about always, most of the time or only some of the time?
- Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all the people?
- Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it?
- Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked?

This index reveals considerable variation for the nation as a whole over time, but little variation among gender, racial, and income groups. Peak levels of trust in the federal government occurred in 1986 for all income groups, before declining through the early 1990s and rising again in 2000. Figure 6-2 displays trends in this measure for different income groups between 1970 and 2002.⁹

Figure 6-2. Trust in Government by Income Percentile, 1970-2004
 Source: National Election Studies, 2005



Immigrant Integration

Many Americans would likely be surprised to learn that immigration to the United States is no greater today than it was at earlier points in the nation's history. Between 1901 and 1925, 17.2 million immigrants were admitted to the United States, a record number at the time. Similarly, 17.1 million immigrants were admitted between 1971 and 1995.¹⁰ The impact of immigration on the U.S. population was greater in the early 1900s, however, when the immigration rate—11.1 per 1,000 native-born residents—was more than two and a half times higher than contemporary immigration rates.¹¹ Perhaps more significantly, the face of immigration has changed. In the early part of the last century, immigrants were overwhelmingly from European nations. Since the 1980s, almost 90 percent of immigrants have come from Central and South America and Asia, while only one in ten are from Europe.¹²

Immigrants historically have greatly benefited from migration networks formed by family, kinship, and friendship ties.¹³ But many immigrants have always needed assistance in integrating into U.S. society. Immigrant integration programs are therefore important to assist newcomers with basic needs such as health care and English-language classes, and to establish themselves in their new communities. But no national immigrant integration policy exists. And despite the fact that federal funding for adult basic education and English classes increased by almost 50 percent between 1992 and 2000, funding has not kept pace with the growing demand for English-language and civic education programs.¹⁴

Moreover, recent federal and state policy developments have limited opportunity for many immigrants. The 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act and other legislation barred many documented and undocumented immigrants from federal programs such as Food Stamps, Social Security benefits, student loans, and other benefits. And state referenda such as California's Proposition 187, which sought to bar undocumented children from attending public schools, have contributed to a growing trend of anti-immigrant legislation, even though some of these policies have been successfully challenged and blocked in federal courts.¹⁵

Americans' Attitudes Toward Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups

Americans share a broad national consensus about the importance of racial and ethnic equality and integration. Survey data consistently reveal a strong positive shift in racial attitudes over the last half century, as whites increasingly express tolerance and egalitarian attitudes about non-whites. Similarly, minorities' attitudes toward whites have improved significantly.¹⁶

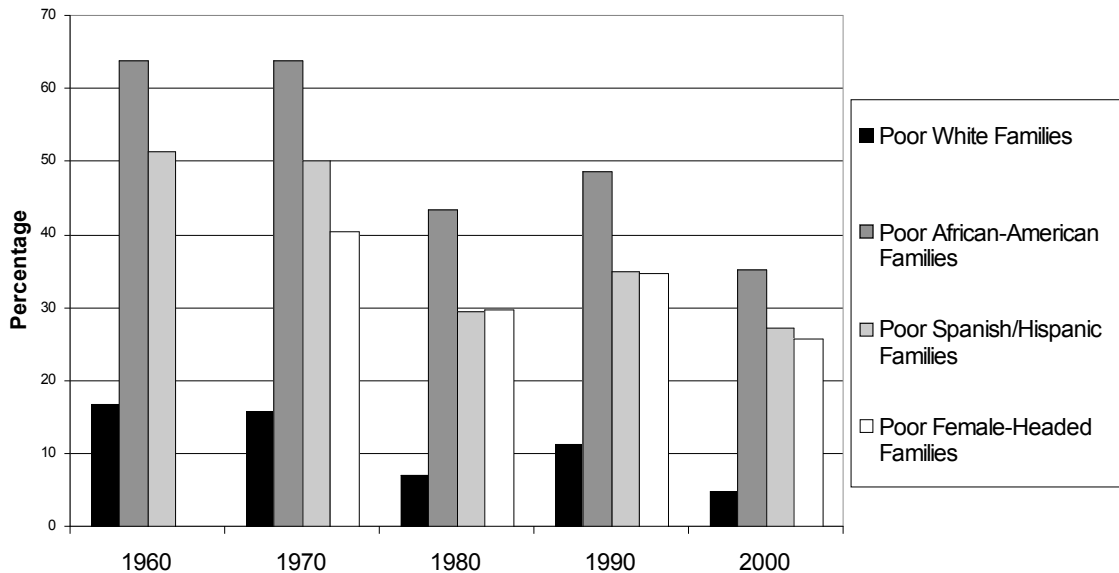
Despite these positive trends, however, in many instances Americans' attitudes stand in contrast with their observable preferences. Sociologists have noted, for example, the consistent tendency in many U.S. communities for whites to leave neighborhoods when African Americans integrate at levels higher than 20 percent.¹⁷ Americans also continue to endorse negative racial and ethnic stereotypes at high rates. Findings from the General Social Survey, for example, reveal that significant majorities of whites believe that African Americans are less intelligent, lazier, and more prone to violence than whites.¹⁸ Moreover, despite the strong plurality of opinion about the need for racial equality, large proportions of white Americans remain opposed to social policies that address inequality, and tend to disagree with minority Americans about the persistence of racial discrimination.¹⁹

Residential Segregation

Historically, the United States has been characterized by high levels of residential segregation on the basis of race, ethnicity, income, and nativity. From the late 1960s through the 1980s, poverty became increasingly concentrated in inner city neighborhoods.²⁰ Encouragingly, levels of racial, ethnic, and income segregation declined in many U.S. communities in the 1990s.²¹ These trends are not consistent across all demographic groups, however. A 2002 study by the U.S. Census Bureau, for example, found that while levels of African American segregation declined across many dimensions between 1980 and 2000, residential segregation is still higher for African Americans than for any other group. In addition, this study found that Hispanics and Asian and Pacific Islanders also face high levels of residential segregation. On some measures of segregation, such as the degree of isolation from other groups, Hispanics and Asians and Pacific Islanders experienced increases in segregation over the last two decades.²²

Residential segregation is particularly problematic when race, ethnicity, and poverty converge. An analysis of trends in the residential segregation of poor families of color, prepared for The Opportunity Agenda by the Washington, D.C.-based Poverty and Race Research Action Council, examines Census Bureau data on the poverty status of neighborhoods. Using data on census tracts within metropolitan areas defined in 1960, this analysis finds that the percentage of poor whites, African Americans, Hispanics, and female-headed households living in high-poverty neighborhoods (those with 30 percent or more residents living in poverty) generally declined between 1960 and 2000. But the rate of decline for poor white families was much sharper than for poor families of color. While poor African-American families were 3.8 times more likely than poor white families to live in high-poverty neighborhoods in metropolitan areas in 1960, they were 7.3 times more likely than poor whites to live in high-poverty neighborhoods in 2000. Similarly, poor Hispanic families were 5.7 times more likely than poor white families to live in high-poverty neighborhoods in 2000, but were only 3.0 times as likely as poor white families to live in such communities in 1960. And while poor female-headed households were 2.5 times more likely than poor whites to live in high-poverty neighborhoods in 1970, they were 5.3 times more likely than poor whites to live in these conditions three decades later. These findings confirm other research that demonstrates that even when family income is similarly low, families of color are more likely to be relegated to high-poverty communities (see Figure 6).²³

Figure 6-3. Percentage of Poor Families Living in High Poverty (30 Percent or More in Poverty) Neighborhoods. 1960-2000
 Source: Poverty and Race Research Action Council, 2005



Note: Analyses restricted to census tracts within metropolitan areas defined in 1960. "Spanish" refers to U.S. Census designations used prior to 1970. No data are available for poor female-headed households prior to 1970

How Can the Nation Enhance Community?

Social Capital. At least two trends have been found to contribute to the decline in social capital in many communities: the increase in television consumption, and the expansion of “exurban” communities far from traditional urban and suburban cores. These trends suggest that government policies to enhance social capital should first carefully consider how regional development strategies and land use such as the placement of parks, recreation centers, and community centers may contribute to social cohesion, and second, assess how television and other media can enhance democratic participation, connection, and expression (see the chapter on *Voice* for a discussion of media democracy). Other strategies such as congregation-based community organizing, civic environmentalism, and participatory school reform are promising strategies to enhance public problem solving.²⁴

Immigrant Integration. An effective comprehensive immigration integration policy is needed to assist newcomers to fully participate in the social, cultural, and political life of the nation. Several strategies are needed, including greater support for programs such as health care, English-language classes, and other social services that provide basic assistance to immigrants. Immigrant workers also require assistance in learning about workplace rights, fair wages and benefits, and means to garner legal assistance to protect these rights. Other programs should encourage public education and outreach to raise newcomers’ awareness of the federal naturalization process, and increase the availability of civics education and other programs that are needed to gain citizenship. Among new citizens, voter education programs and other efforts to increase political participation (discussed in the chapter on *Voice*) are important to stimulate political engagement and empowerment.

Residential Segregation. Communities that are highly segregated on the basis of race, ethnicity, and poverty receive fewer and poorer quality public services, are disproportionately victimized by high levels of crime and violence (often accompanied by aggressive law enforcement tactics), face higher levels of environmental health risks, and are plagued with a host of other problems. Moreover, the costs of segregation--both in human and economic terms--burden *all* communities. As noted in the chapter on *Mobility*, housing policies should encourage the development of mixed-income communities, and land use policies should consider the impact of zoning decisions on the isolation of racial, ethnic, and high-poverty communities. Because a high level of housing discrimination on the basis of race and ethnicity persists (as discussed in the section on *Equality*) stepped-up state and federal enforcement of anti-discrimination laws is necessary, perhaps enforced through audit studies. And because mortgage lending discrimination also may limit the housing options of many low-income and minority families, federal enforcement of the 1968 Fair Housing Act must be strengthened.

¹ R.J. Sampson, J.D. Morenoff, and S. Raudenbush, “Social Anatomy of Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Violence,” *American Journal of Public Health* 95, no. 2 (2005): 224-232.

-
- ² R.D. Putman and L.M. Feldstein, *Better Together: Restoring the American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2003).
- ³ R. Putnam, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy*, 6, no. 1 (1995): 35-42.
- ⁴ Saguaro Seminar, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, "Civic Engagement in America: Factoids," n.d., www.ksg.harvard.edu/saguaro (2 November 2005).
- ⁵ American Association of Fundraising Counsel, "Charitable Giving Rises 5 Percent to Nearly \$250 Billion in 2004," press release, 2005, www.aafc.org (2 December 2005).
- ⁶ Bureau of Labor Statistics, *Volunteering in the United States, 2004*, December 2004, www.bls.gov (19 November 2005).
- ⁷ Independent Sector, *Giving and Volunteering in the United States, 2001*, November 2001, www.independentsector.org (12 October 2005).
- ⁸ Social Capital Community Benchmark Survey National Sample, 2000, www.ropercenter.uconn.edu/dataacq/scc_bench.html#table (2 December 2005).
- ⁹ The National Election Studies, Center for Political Studies, University of Michigan, 2005, www.electionstudies.org/nesguide/nesguide.htm (24 August 2005).
- ¹⁰ M. Zhou, "Immigration and the Dynamics of Race and Ethnicity," *America Becoming: Racial Trends and Their Consequences, Vol. 1*, eds. N. Smelzer, W.J. Wilson, and F. Mitchell (Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2001).
- ¹¹ Ibid.
- ¹² Ibid.
- ¹³ Ibid.
- ¹⁴ The Carnegie Corporation, *The House We All Live In: A Report on Immigrant Civic Integration* (New York: The Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2003).
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ L. Bobo, "Racial Attitudes and Relations at the Close of the Twentieth Century," in Smelzer, Wilson, and Mitchell, 2001.
- ¹⁷ D. Massey, "Residential Segregation and Neighborhood Conditions in U.S. Metropolitan Areas," in Smelzer, Wilson, and Mitchell, 2001.
- ¹⁸ Bobo 2001.
- ¹⁹ Ibid.
- ²⁰ G.T. Kingsley and K.L.S. Pettit, *Concentrated Poverty: A Change in Course*, May 2003, www.urban.org (13 November 2005); P.A. Jargowsky, *Stunning Progress, Hidden Problems: The Dramatic Decline of Concentrated Poverty in the 1990s*, May 2003, www.brookings.edu (14 October 2004).
- ²¹ Jargowsky 2003.
- ²² U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Racial and Ethnic Residential Segregation in the United States: 1980-2000* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Commerce, August 2002).
- ²³ Poverty and Race Research Action Council analysis of U.S. Census Bureau data, with the assistance of Nancy A. Denton and Bridget J. Anderson, 2005.
- ²⁴ C. Sirianni and L. Friedland L, "Social Capital," www.cpn.org/tools/dictionary/capital.htm (8 November 2005).