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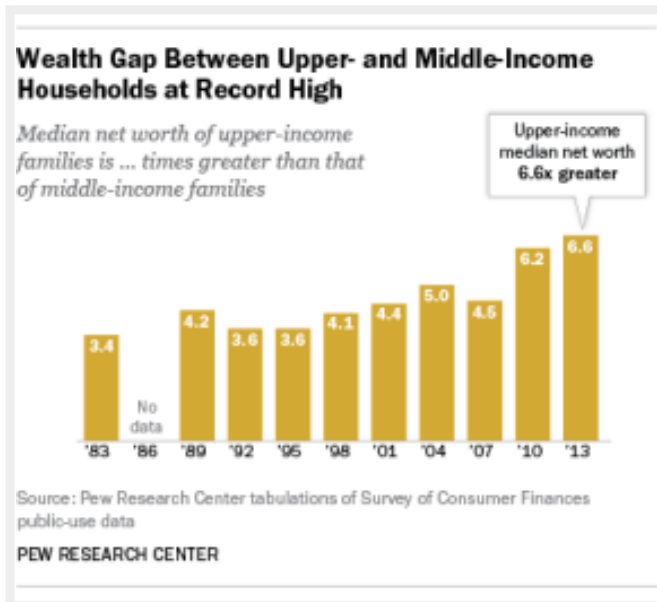
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JANUARY 20, 2015

Is the rise in inequality eroding trust?

December 19, 2014 by [stevenyoder](#) [Leave a Comment](#)



U.S. leaders care a great deal about capital formation—the creation of the buildings, equipment, and other infrastructure that allow the economy to grow. Policies designed to encourage it, like more money for highways or bigger tax writeoffs for R&D investment, get serious hearings on Capitol Hill.

But over the last 30 years, another kind of capital—social capital—has fast been eroding. That’s the conclusion of a new

[study](#) in the October issue of the journal *Psychological Science*. U.S. social capital, as measured by trust in other people and the country’s institutions, has fallen dramatically and for reasons that could have everything to do with economics, the researchers conclude.

FEATURED VIDEO

[Aziz Abu Sarah – For more tolerance, we need more ... tourism?](#)

Historically low levels of public trust in Congress have become something of an easy punchline to nearly every media story about rising partisanship. In a September poll, for example, 65 percent of people said that the outgoing Congress is the worst ever. But that mistrust extends well beyond Congress. For example, all of 23 percent of people have confidence in the criminal justice system, 22 percent in newspapers, 21 percent in big business, 26 percent in public schools, and 45 percent in the church or organized religion, according to Gallup data.

That mistrust also extends to other people. Data from the U.S. General Social Survey of adults found that in 1972–1974, 46 percent of adults agreed that “most people can be trusted.” By 2010–2012, that figure was only 33 percent. Data for teenagers show a similar pattern. The national Monitoring the Future survey of 12th graders in 1976–1978 found that 32 percent agreed that most people can be trusted, but only 18 percent did so in 2010–2012.

Overall, trust in others and confidence in institutions are at their lowest point in more than 30 years, conclude the study’s lead researcher, psychological scientist Jean Twenge of San Diego State University, and her two colleagues.

More surprising is the connection they found between trust and income inequality. In the years they studied, greater income inequality predicted lower trust in others. “With the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, people trust each other less,” Twenge said in a press release. “There’s a growing perception that other people are cheating or taking advantage to get ahead, as evidenced, for example, by the ideas around the 1 percent in the Occupy protests.”

The researchers noted that confidence in institutions rose and fell in waves from the 1970s to 2010s. Confidence was high in the late 1980s and again in the early 2000s but declined to its lowest point in the early 2010s. Those patterns also correspond with the rise and fall in rates of income inequality and poverty.

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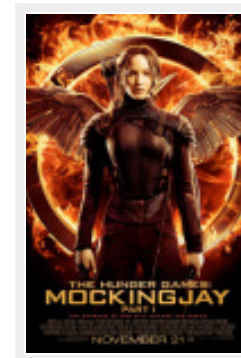
Commentary: For Hunger Games – Mockingjay, teens are doing the marketing

December 4, 2014

By Joan Oleck – The Hunger Games:

Mockingjay—Part 1

is, for its teen fan base, a powerful lesson in marketing manipulation. For anyone not living in a cave, this third film in the series of four is based on



It's not the first time that a study has looked at a potential relationship between inequality and trust. In a bombshell 2009 book, British public health researchers Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett crunched data on inequality and trust levels across 23 of the world's richest countries and the 50 U.S. states. (Among OECD countries, the U.S. has the second-most unequal distribution of post-tax and -transfer incomes of any country, ranking behind only Chile.)

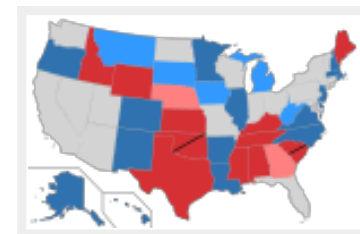
Their findings in *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger* showed striking correlations between inequality and trust. In more equal countries, the percentage of people who agree that "most people can be trusted" tends to be higher than in those that are less equal. It's near 70 percent in the most equal of the 23 nations—Finland—but only 20 percent in Singapore, the most unequal. The same pattern holds true even among U.S. states—in highly equal New Hampshire, more than 60 percent of survey respondents believe people can be trusted, but in highly unequal Mississippi, it's 17 percent.

Critics might contend that the causal connection runs in the opposite direction—might lack of social capital cause inequality? But Wilkinson and Pickett point to the work of University of Maryland political scientist Eric Uslander. In his book *The Moral Foundations of Trust*. Uslander used a statistical test for causality showing that inequality affects trust but not the reverse. "Trust," Uslander concluded, "cannot thrive in an unequal world."

Correlation, of course, doesn't equal causation, and Wilkinson and Pickett's book was attacked for not accounting for cultural factors that might sway trust levels and the other social welfare outcomes that their study assessed. But the wealth of studies showing similar findings, like this latest in *Psychological Science*, are starting to create something of a consensus that inequality matters. That may be why even Republican candidates [talked](#) in their pre-election stump speeches about issues like inequality, economic mobility, and poverty.

the uber-successful book series by Suzanne Collins and weaves a compelling tale of teen survival in [...]

**Commentary:
The 2014 US
Midterms –
The
democratic
election
that wasn't**



November 11, 2014

Commentary: The 2014 US Midterms – The democratic election that wasn't American democracy is predicated on two critical pillars. The selection of political representatives by the majority via the ballot box, and the availability of timely and accurate information that is vital for voters in their assessment of candidates and policies consistent with their self-interest. [...]

**Commentary:
International
community
must address
Myanmar's
mistreatment
of Rohingya
minority at East Asian summit**



October 31, 2014

Wilkinson and Pickett point out that in 1831, French visitor Alexis de Tocqueville was impressed during his visit to the United States with the country's "equality of conditions" and social cohesion. But with those conditions fast eroding, policymakers across the spectrum may increasingly be forced to pay attention to what the fraying of the country's social capital means for its democratic inheritance.

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[Vernā Myers – How to overcome our biases? Walk boldly toward them](#) »

As Myanmar, a country with an incipient democracy and alarming human rights record, prepares to host a prestigious regional issues summit in coming weeks, the Southeast Asian nation's galling treatment of its ethnic minority populations is receiving renewed attention. It's an inopportune time for the country's president, Thein Sein, for these issues to be resurfacing in [...]

Commentary:
Bandwagon outrage over Brunei's strict Islamic criminal code all but gone



October 18, 2014

When Brunei became the first Southeast Asian country to nationally adopt a strict Islamic penal code known as Sharia earlier this year, the world was outraged. News and social media told us so in such headlines as "Brunei adopts sharia law amid international outcry" and "Ellen DeGeneres backs boycott of Brunei-owned hotels over 'stone the [...]"

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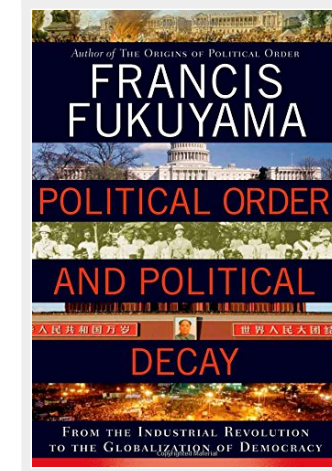
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Book recommendation: Political Order and Political Decay

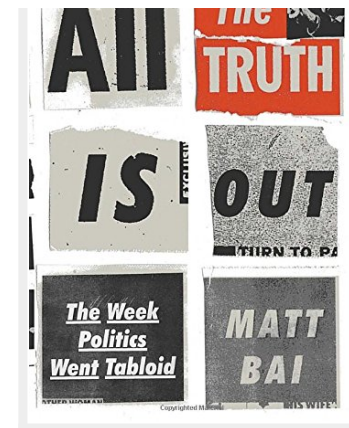
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Book recommendation:

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