

Does Abandoning Community Lead to Inequality?

For years the people in my neighborhood expressed a reserved politeness toward one another. But last year, that politeness exploded into downright camaraderie.

The reason? The city council decided to railroad a project through that the young and old, rich and poor, liberal and conservative commonly despise.

P.S. A common enemy unites even the oldest of foes.

But the camaraderie which my neighbors are now experiencing is a bit of an oddity in many American communities. According to [Pew Research](#), only half of all Americans trust their neighbors. That trust declines even further among minority communities such as blacks, Hispanics, and those in lower economic brackets.

Pew chalks these differences up as further proof of income and racial inequality in the U.S. But is it possible that this lack of trust and camaraderie which many communities are experiencing is actually a main driver behind inequality?

Alexis de Tocqueville raised the connection between equality and community in his classic work [Democracy in America](#). According to Tocqueville, wealthy, aristocratic communities do not have to “combine in order to act,” largely because they have the power and connections to pull strings and get their way. Societies formed on democratic terms, however, are a different story:

*“Among democratic nations, on the contrary, all the citizens are independent and feeble; they can do hardly anything by themselves, and none of them can oblige his fellow men to lend him their assistance. **They all, therefore, become***

powerless if they do not learn voluntarily to help one another. ... A people among whom individuals lost the power of achieving great things single-handed, without acquiring the means of producing them by united exertions, would soon relapse into barbarism."

America is clearly not a society where individuals can achieve things single-handedly. And indicators such as the above Pew report show that Americans aren't so hot at banding together to accomplish things either. If we continue to lose our interest or trust in associating with one another, will we diminish our chances at equality and further lead ourselves towards the barbarism which Tocqueville predicts?

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