



Beyond Tocqueville: Civil Society and the Social Capital Debate in Comparative Perspective (Civil Society: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives)

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Recent discussion about the role of civil society in democratic governance around the world and the decline of social capital in the US has raised pressing theoretical and empirical questions about the character of contemporary societies and the social and institutional correlates of sound and dynamic democracies. This debate has reached a North American and European audience that extends well beyond academia.

The predominant refrain in the debate, following Alexis de Tocqueville's 160-year-old analysis of democracy in America, attaches tremendous importance to the role of voluntary associations in contemporary democracies. Participation in such groups is said to produce social capital, often linked to high levels of social trust. Social capital in turn is conceived as a crucial national resource for promoting collective action for the common good.

Beyond Tocqueville presents 21 varied essays on how civic engagement and political and economic cooperation are generated in contemporary societies, linking theoretical discourse with public policy and actual behaviors.

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