

# 23

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## CIVIL SOCIETY

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The tendency of individuals to group themselves according to race, geographic location, and interest has been seen as natural by both historical theorists and contemporary political scientists. It is not surprising that groups are viewed in this way by individuals who think about or study politics. Politics often requires a basic recognition of the necessity of groups for political organization either as a single group of citizens, as factions of competing interests, or as separate races that share a common leader. Therefore, it appears nearly impossible to consider politics without considering the effects of groups on the system as a whole.

The interaction of groups and political actors in society is best conceived through the discussion of civil society, social networks, and social capital. In this chapter, each of these terms describes an aspect of a single idea that associations shape social and political life. *Social networks* are often informal organizations of individuals that span diverse segments of society (Gibson, 2001). These networks can be small or large, but their ultimate purpose becomes promoting the common interest of the network. Within these networks, social capital can be accumulated. *Social capital* is “the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance or recognition” (Bourdieu, 1985, p. 248). The accumulation of social capital encourages individuals to act together to achieve common goals.

Without social capital, the achievement of those goals would be impossible. The ebb and flow of social capital accumulation, especially within the context of social networks, creates social associations that interact at various levels of society and government with varying degrees of formality. This broad condition has come to be understood as *civil society*. Social networks interact with other social networks within the purview of civil society. The actions of individuals within civil society promote increases and decreases in social capital that affect future interactions of individuals and social networks. While these terms are separate in what they specifically represent, the central theme remains consistent that relationships matter.

Although historically inseparable from politics in general, the formal discussion and exploration of groups in society have developed with the spread of democracy since the early 19th century. With democracy came the need to consider the preferences of individuals. Often, these preferences were recognized and shared by individuals, who thus organized themselves into groups based on those shared preferences. The desire of political leaders to know and respond to these groups has promoted the study of associations in society.

This chapter looks at the theoretical and empirical pursuits of research involving the study of social capital, social networks, and civil society. Before delving into the contemporary ideas that are the primary subject of this chapter, it is important to discuss the role of associations

and groups in political life as it has been seen historically. Next, the theoretical concepts of social capital, social networks, and civil society are laid out separately, with attention given to how the terms are interrelated. Then, the relationship of the concepts to the study of democracy is examined as the primary line of research involving social capital, social networks, and civil society. The next section focuses on social capital and civil society as they relate to the economy and the broader society. Then criticisms and avenues for future research are discussed.

### The Importance of Associations in Political Life

From the advent of political society discussed by the ancient Greek philosophers to the earliest observations of American democracy and through the global adoption of democracy in the mid-20th century, the recognition of the centrality of humans associating with each other has been revealed and accepted in the context of participatory politics. For Aristotle (circa 335 BCE), in order for individuals to make the correct decision in choosing leaders, citizens had to know about each other. Lacking this knowledge, it was impossible to make proper political decisions for the community. In this way, Aristotle viewed the city as a group in which individuals interacted to gain knowledge of each other's character and preferences. This interaction was necessary when politics required the participation of citizens.

In his observations of early American democracy, Alexis de Tocqueville (1840) wrote at length on the prevalence and necessity of associations in the young country. He viewed these associations as important to the type of participatory society that had blossomed. In America, associations were engaged more successfully than in any other place in the world at that time. By being involved in associations, American citizens were able to overcome their lack of influence as separate individuals. Tocqueville observed that when individuals with a common opinion met, they naturally combined themselves into an association. As the association grew, political actors were forced to take notice of the association and recognize the preferences of the group members. In this way, associations empowered individuals in the political context, which forced accommodation by political actors. It is these associations that maintain the core of the civil society, social networks, and social capital discussion.

Following the observations of Tocqueville, Émile Durkheim (1893/1984) explored the interactions of individuals within society and observed that connections between individuals remain after the initial interaction. These remaining social ties contribute to the functioning of the community in a manner that is broader than the initial interaction by shaping the condition of social capital that results from the interaction. In this way, associations

persistently affect one another through the lasting impact that individuals make on each other.

Many early political scientists promoted the importance of voluntary associations. For example, Almond and Verba (1963) promoted voluntary associations as the most important mediating factor between individuals and the state. Associating with other individuals in a voluntary association gives a person increased political resources that can be used to achieve his or her desired political ends. Also, membership in associations affects an individual's political attitudes. For Almond and Verba, voluntary associations were as important as they were variable. It is this accepted variation between groups that shaped the inquiries related to civil society, social networks, and social capital in the decades that followed Almond and Verba's research.

### A Theory of Social Capital, Social Networks, and Civil Society

Social capital, social networks, and civil society are terms and ideas that are related but not necessarily synonymous. Social capital can be the measure by which social networks and civil society are evaluated, but ultimately, it describes relations between individuals or entities. Civil society is an aggregate perspective of relative social capital per sector, society, or state. Social networks are the building blocks of civil society but are generally considered both autonomous from each other and yet integrated into a common civil society. To understand them all, we must understand each.

#### Social Capital

While decades of work focused on the role of associations in daily life, the concept of social capital did not become cemented in its contemporary form until Coleman (1988) examined different forms of capital and pronounced that, like other forms of capital, social capital existed and facilitated interactions between individuals or organizations. In comparison with physical and human capital, social capital was seen as the least tangible. Instead of focusing on production or relative skill sets, social capital focuses on the functions of certain aspects of the social structure. "The function identified by the concept of 'social capital' is the value of these aspects of social structure to actors as resources that they can use to achieve their interests" (Coleman, 1988, p. S101). Identifying the functions of the social structure became one way to account for the differences of outcomes for individuals, without having to elaborate on the social structure details through which the transitions occur.

To briefly summarize an example provided by Coleman, clandestine organizations can help promote revolutionary activities where otherwise peaceful protests are the expected outcome. In this scenario, the organization of individuals is the social capital that causes the change to revolutionary output. The system remains unchanged. Instead, it is the

introduction of a form of social capital different from what had already existed that prompts the new output. A stable system can produce highly varied outcomes, depending on the social capital that is invested, along with the systematic resources. Coleman's basic assertion is that producing and integrating social capital to produce certain outcomes is no different from combining a raw material (e.g., petroleum) with various physical capital (e.g., technologies) to produce different products (e.g., motor oil vs. gasoline).

For Coleman, the reality of social capital in social structures is dictated by obligations, expectations, and trustworthiness. Ultimately, this dynamic can be easily defined as a system of general reciprocity in which doing something for an individual will prompt a comparable response by the receiving individual. In this situation, trust in the individual who is being helped creates an expectation in that individual to reciprocate. For the individual being helped, an obligation to return the favor is felt and carried through. It is in this manner that social capital is created and developed. An individual can have a store of social capital that he or she can redeem to shape the outcome of a situation. Trust is the crux of the social capital dynamic. Without trust, social capital is virtually impossible to produce.

For Uslaner (2002), trust is a central consideration in many aspects of human activity. While he accepts that trust is not the only way to achieve cooperation, he embraces the idea that a system of reciprocity is more reliable with higher levels of trust. For social capital to operate in the manner perceived by Coleman, generalized reciprocity must be anticipated. Therefore, trust must be achieved, but it must also be assumed. For other researchers, changes in the dynamic of trust reshape the reality of social capital and thus shape civil society in general.

In an attempt to clarify the role of social capital in affecting governance and the reverse of government affecting social capital, Putnam and Goss (2003) differentiated social capital so that the variation between systems could be more easily judged. Some social capital is formal whereas other social capital is informal. The type of organizational structure (e.g., union vs. supper club) dictates whether social capital is formal or not. Another distinction is between thick and thin social capital. *Thick* social capital exists in tightly connected groups, with *thin* social capital being more prevalent among acquaintances. *Inward looking* social capital focuses on the well-being of group members, whereas *outward looking* social capital focuses on public goods. Finally, *bridging* social capital brings dissimilar individuals together, as opposed to *bonding* social capital, which brings similar individuals together. Although Putnam and Goss's distinctions do not greatly add to the theoretical conceptualization laid out by Coleman, they help to clarify the variations in social capital.

## Social Networks

In his seminal works examining civil society and social networks, Putnam adopts the idea of social capital discussed

above. For Putnam, like Coleman, social capital centers on trust and generalized reciprocity. In examining civil societies, he also promotes social capital as a public good that is achievable by everyone in a society. In this way, social capital deviates from other forms of capital, including physical and human capital. Social capital and networks of civic engagement create and maintain norms that can act as natural constraints on individuals' or groups' actions through the recognition and embrace of externalities that result from actions that are either positive or negative for the individuals involved. Therefore, social capital can be created, maintained, and redeemed to affect outcomes in an organized system.

The main avenue through which social capital operates is networks of civic engagement, or social networks. In his study of the development of Italy's economic and social institutions, Putnam (1993) considers the form of networks that existed hundreds of years ago and their effect on institutional outcomes in contemporary Italy. Unlike civil society, which is much broader, social networks are particular to the shared interests of the participating individuals. Individuals can be involved in multiple networks that often overlap. These networks are seen by Putnam as instruments for organizing social capital, with many positive outcomes. In fact, Putnam considers these networks of civic engagement to be social capital themselves. In a contemporary sense, these networks could be parent-teacher associations, service fraternities, political parties, tennis clubs, and the like.

The benefits of social networks are often dictated by the density of the networks. *Density* means the quantity and intensity of individuals and interactions in the group. Basically, increased cooperation for mutual benefit is easier in denser networks and more difficult in less dense networks. Putnam (1993) lists a number of other ways that these networks benefit their members. The defection of individuals from the desired outcome of the network is discouraged through increasing the potential cost of defection for the individual. This encourages cooperation. Robust norms of reciprocity are also encouraged by networks of civic engagement. The degree of trustworthiness of individuals is easier to identify because of the increased levels of communication and information flows that are facilitated by the network. Also, the success of networks in achieving collaboration can serve as a template for future collaboration.

Structurally, networks of civic engagement are horizontal in nature. Horizontal networks are not structured hierarchically but are instead dispersed across society in a manner that renders positions in the various networks as roughly equivalent in terms of power. This is not to say that they are always structured in this way, but they are best at achieving the above stated goals when they are horizontal. According to Putnam, only through horizontal networks can social trust and cooperation be achieved. Properly organized social networks can encourage social capital that can improve the efficiency

of society through the encouragement of coordinating actions.

### Civil Society

In his writings on the development of Italian society and the changes in the American context, Putnam (1993, 1995, 2000) is most interested in examining the trends of social capital in civil society. For civil society, the focus is on the community in general. Unlike the direct relationships between individuals and entities that are most important for social capital, or the interest-specific networks of civic engagement, civil society is a broad picture of the community. When one is studying civil society, it is important to understand that degrees of connectedness between individuals and entities and within social networks can have society-wide effects that can result from aggregate levels of civic engagement.

Like the positive effects of social networks that were discussed above, the positive externalities of associations and social capital accumulation can affect even those individuals with zero social capital, or those who are involved in no networks. Communities that have generally higher levels of connectedness and social capital stock often find collective action to be easier. This is due to the pervasiveness of the norms that are developed between individuals and within networks. Therefore, trends that affect individuals will subsequently affect entire networks or sectors and ultimately the entire society.

This idea of a broad civil society is addressed in Putnam's 1995 journal article "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital." In his research, Putnam points to the reality of increased political disengagement as having originated with changes in individual-to-individual interaction, as well as broader changes in the construct of social networks. These changes, he contends, subsequently reshaped the orientation of America's civil society.

Putnam derives his research question (why has civil society changed?) from a seemingly unrelated observation of political participation. He notes that political participation, particularly voting, has steadily declined in the United States. In trying to understand why this has happened, he looks to changes that have occurred in civil society. From this examination, he draws a simple observation on which he rests his argument: U.S. citizens are bowling now more than ever, but participation in bowling leagues is lower now than ever before. Like the examples of social networks, or networks of civic engagement, discussed above, bowling leagues can promote the creation and accumulation of social capital. Putnam moves from this specific observation to a broader set of observations, all reaching the same conclusion that social networks are changing and declining. Reverting back to his understanding of social capital, he contends that a negative shift in "neighborliness" and "social trust" has accompanied the decline in civic engagement. While the direction of the causal arrow is left to future research, Putnam uses this reality to describe the

aggregate-level situation that is present in U.S. civil society. Although he gives a number of potential explanations for this change, what is certain is that it has happened.

As the above discussion of the theories surrounding the concepts of social capital, social networks, and civil society makes clear, each of the concepts is related to the others and yet carries its own distinct characteristics for whom it pertains to and what functions it affects. Social capital is a building block composed of trust and generalized reciprocity through which relationships are established and maintained. Social networks expand the relationships so that they exist between more than just two individuals and are naturally grown by the light of common interests. The extent to which social capital is embraced through social networks shapes the general understanding of a system's civil society. The degree of interconnectedness in a system affects the relative development of that system's civil society, which in turn affects many other aggregate conditions of society at large.

The next section looks at the main line of research in which civil society and social capital are considered: democracy. From this research, tangent lines of research have also developed to consider the impact of social capital, social networks, and civil society. To round out the discussion, criticisms and future research areas are explored.

### Civil Society, Social Capital, Social Networks, and Democracy

In participatory political systems (i.e., democracy), the context within which individuals operate dictates their perspective and subsequent action in that system. Just as individuals with larger amounts of wealth are expected to act differently from individuals with meager amounts of wealth, so too are individuals in groups expected to act differently from individuals not in groups. In this intuitive reasoning, it is easy to see that associations bring change to the operations of individuals in politics. This is evident in the debate that surrounded the creation of the U.S. political system, in which the federalists and antifederalists supported competing perspectives on how to create the best government to represent the people.

For James Madison, factions were to be guarded against in the new U.S. democracy. In Federalist No. 10, Madison (1787/1982) made clear that it is natural for individuals to organize themselves into associations with others with whom they share similar interests. Outside of suspending the liberty of citizens, the only way to control the effects of factious associations was by creating a republican form of government. This, he imagined, would ameliorate the effects of the factions without suspending liberty or undermining the participatory political system that the U.S. forefathers intended to create. This early example makes evident the profound nature of associations in democracy. For studies looking at the impact of social capital, social networks, and civil society, their effects on government type, and especially democracy, have been the most

central in this line of research. This section considers some of the research that has been conducted looking at the impact of civil society (and its parts) on democracy.

As discussed above, Putnam (1995) observed the decline in voting in the United States and desired to explain why this had happened. He theorized that declines in participation in associations had caused a decline in social capital, which subsequently led to the decline in voting. For Putnam, the decline in voting ultimately stemmed from the disconnect that had been growing between individuals. Without a need to be connected, there was little need to make group decisions. Although his tests are simple, his conclusions are presented as concrete: Decreases in civil society participation caused the decline in voting.

Writing in 1995, Verba, Schlozman, and Brady considered civic life and its effect on politics in general. They asserted that nonpolitical institutions (including associations and social networks) enhanced citizen activity in politics. This happened for a number of reasons. For instance, participants in civil society were exposed to increased political stimuli that enhanced their willingness and ability to participate in politics. Also, participation in civil society encouraged further participation in civil society so that associational engagement had a multiplicative effect for citizens and society.

Associations also dictate much in democratic societies by setting the political agenda (Cohen & Rogers, 1992). They act as intermediaries between individuals and the state. This action, as an intermediary, can give an association specifically, or civil society broadly, a great deal of power in shaping and coordinating the preferences of participants. Although Cohen and Rogers, like Madison, are concerned with curbing the role of factious associations, they admit that groups and networks can often contribute to democratic governance in a positive manner.

Political participation is particularly important in democratic societies and has thus occupied much of the research on social capital, social networks, civil society, and democracy. In their work looking at participation in the United States, Rosenstone and Hansen (2003) see the voluntary aspect of social involvement as being important in citizen mobilization. First, most groups engage in their own political mobilization. Second, groups expose their members to sympathetic politicians and activists who engage in mobilizing the members. Finally, simply being a member of an organization exposes the members to potential rewards that are jointly sought by other members and can be best achieved through political action. In this way, the degree of social capital, social networks, and civil society can variably affect participation in political life.

For Verba, Nie, and Kim (1978), voluntary associations have an effect on citizen participation that is independent of resources or other factors. These associations can modify the exchange of resources in political activity. Verba et al. anticipated that associations should motivate participation, especially voting, to a greater extent than strictly resources would. However, they also found that resources influence association membership. Presaging this sentiment,

Huntington and Nelson (1976) found that organizational membership is important for political participation. While Verba, Nie, and Kim focus on seven countries that tend to be more developed, Huntington and Nelson are strictly considering countries that are less developed.

Following the lead of Huntington and Nelson (1976), many other researchers have focused on the developing world. This distinction is important because it introduces increased variation in outcomes, which are often more stable across developed countries. The best example of the third world context introducing a new wrinkle to the study of civil society is an article written by Booth and Richard (1998). In their research, they identify a sector of society that they term *uncivil society*. This uncivil society is violent and confrontational and often antidemocratic in its associational condition. Like other variations on civil society, this sector affects governmental action and outputs. Unlike more developed countries, uncivil society is more prevalent in developing regions and specifically Central America.

In countries that have recently transitioned to democracy, social networks have been shown to facilitate that transition. Gibson (2001) explores this concept by looking at post-Communist Russia. Having developed out of the closed Soviet society, social networks with weak ties between individuals occupied the position normally held by formal civil society in helping initiate and develop democracy. Gibson finds that, although informal in nature, social networks provided the political discussion and organization that could evolve into a robust civil society. It becomes easy to see that the social capital–civil society relationship is developmental in nature but can be trusted to emerge from even weak social networks.

Beyond facilitating transitions to democracy, the continuation and consolidation of a democratic system are encouraged by civil society. Although many researchers and theorists have focused on the preeminent role of elites in affecting democratic systems, properly functioning democracies undoubtedly require the input of the people. For this reason, Diamond (1999) sees civil society as irreplaceable for democratic success. In many ways, civil society plays an intermediary role between the private sphere and the state. First, civil society focuses on public ends over private ends. Next, it relates to the state but does not seek to control it. Finally, civil society encompasses pluralism and diversity (Diamond, 1999). Representing the interests of the people, civil society's most important role is its ability to check and limit the power of the state while simultaneously helping to reform it. Therefore, civil society can be roundly viewed as a positive influence on democratic systems.

## Other Lines of Research

Besides affecting democratic governance, social capital, social networks, and civil society affect the economic and productive aspects of society. In initially laying out the theoretical underpinnings of social capital, Coleman (1988)

was looking to explain the creation of human capital (e.g., through education). Ultimately, he found that the presence of social capital in the immediate interactions that students had with community members and family, as well as the general social capital present in the community, affected relative drop-out rates among students. Thus, he demonstrated that social capital is an important form of capital, like physical, financial, and human capital, for shaping the economic potential of an individual and the community.

For Putnam's (1993) study of Italy, the development of social capital (and subsequent social networks) was crucial in initiating the economic differences in development for northern and southern Italy. The existence of a vibrant civil society in northern Italy, derived from the mutual assistance established by trade guilds, encouraged an efficient economy that fostered economic development. In the south, vertically organized societies never allowed for cooperation and subsequently stunted economic development. For Putnam, the ideas of reciprocity and trust are a cornerstone for positive development in most aspects of society, including the economy.

These concepts of efficiency in the productive aspects of society are echoed by Dekker and Uslaner (2001) in the sociological discussion of the role of social capital in affecting economic outcomes for communities. For these authors, a number of conditions result from stronger social networks and social capital relations. First, information sharing encourages efficiency by allowing individuals to avoid inefficient means of production. Second, activities are more coordinated in communities with higher social capital. The example that the authors give points to the failures of irrigation systems due to self-interested actions by farmers who diverted water because the opportunity existed. Third, collective decision making encourages a more efficient distribution of public goods. For Dekker and Uslaner, all three of these efficiency-encouraging activities result from higher levels of social capital in a community.

Besides the governmental and economic effects of social capital, social networks, and civil society, a number of strictly communal impacts have been identified. The clearest identification of some of these benefits is made by Putnam and Feldstein (2003). Not only are the benefits of social capital individual specific, but they also extend to the community as a public good. Drawing correlations between the degree of social capital and community conditions, Putnam and Feldstein observe that communities with higher degrees of social capital (conceived of and measured differently) also have lower crime rates, healthier newborns, and lower drop-out rates. These improved conditions illustrate social capital's importance in society beyond the scope of economic efficiency and democratic governance.

## Criticisms

Many studies have extended the ideas associated with social capital, social networks, and civil society in ways

that are critical but productive. Most criticisms derive from the idea that these terms are incomplete. Work by Foley and Edwards (1996) is a good example of this extension. Beyond the understanding of civil society that this chapter has discussed (i.e., that civil society promotes further civility in the population that subsequently fosters democratic governance), the researchers embrace the inclusion of an alternative civil society. They conceive traditional civil society, called Civil Society I, and the alternative civil society, called Civil Society II.

Civil Society II is more autonomous from the governmental apparatus and is thus in a better position to oppose it. This argument is especially applicable for tyrannical regimes. In that context, Civil Society II is able to oppose the tyrannical regime and potentially encourage regime change. In a similar manner, Booth and Richard (1998) extend the discussion of civil society to include Civil Society III. This form of civil society is limited to strict efforts of regime replacement. Basically, Civil Society III is revolutionary in nature. While each of these criticisms is more productive than not, it is important to focus on the completeness of the concept in all contexts.

Another prominent criticism of the social capital, social networks, and civil society discussion is that the conclusions surrounding the impact of associations are overstated. Although many researchers contend that social capital directly impacts aspects of individual and societal life, others disagree, saying that it is only a part of the puzzle. For instance, Stolle and Hooghe (2003) question the importance of associational life for individuals. Also, they conclude that the impact of social capital outside of the group setting is weak, if present at all. Although they do not desire to remove associational life from its prominent position of study, they encourage a distinct focus on the internal workings of groups (and the subsequent social capital movement). Also, Stolle and Hooghe push for further study of the external impacts of groups and the role of civil society.

Another criticism that often arises in studies of social capital, social networks, and civil society is that of measurement of the topic in focus. How does someone accurately measure an idea such as social capital? Approaches to measurement abound. Some individuals prefer surveys to identify social capital. Not without problems, surveys can often make cross-country comparisons impossible because of a lack of transferability of ideas. For civil society, many researchers employ the number of groups in a society or the number of groups to which an individual belongs on average. Again, problems of measurement emerge pertaining to what groups to include, how to distinguish between group types, and whether to include a time element in the measure. Social networks also pose difficulties in measurement due to the intrinsically weak nature of the connections between individuals. Although these issues are not insurmountable,

they must be considered in evaluating the conclusions about the concepts that are drawn by researchers.

## Future Research

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Research on social capital, social networks, and civil society has come a long way since the work of Coleman and Putnam 20 years ago. However, as the concepts have continued to develop, the context of society has continued to change. With this change comes a need to continue developing the concepts and test for changes in their applicability. One example of a new concept that may shed light on the role of social capital in affecting democratic behavior is that of *political capital*. According to Booth and Richard (2009), political capital is the linkage mechanism that connects social capital to political outcomes. Studies like this will help clarify the effect of social capital and civil society on democracies.

One major change that has occurred over the past decade, and that will cause a particular need for further research, is the development of technology, which has reshaped how we perceive groups to be structured. In his study of the United States, Putnam (1995, 2000) points to the technological development of television as a cause of the decline in neighborliness, which directly affected civil society. The advent of what he calls *tertiary associations*, understood as associations that involve mostly mailings and dues payments but few meetings, changed the way people in America viewed groups. In these ways, groups and their impact on politics and society changed over time.

Technological innovations that will again change the impact of groups on politics and society most notably involve the Internet. Although interactions among group members are more direct on the Internet than in the case of tertiary associations, it is uncertain whether social capital developed through the Internet will act similarly to that developed in community associations such as the parent–teacher association at a local school. In many ways, social networking sites are exactly as advertised: social networks. In other ways, these sites appear to encourage individualism before generalized reciprocity. For these reasons, research focusing on the role of social capital, social networks, and civil society must continue.

Without anticipating technological innovations, is there still a place for research as it is being conducted now? The answer is a resounding yes. The more classical perspective on the roles of associations in society still demands a great deal of attention in the developing world. Many countries continue to strive for democratic governance, and many others are pushing for the consolidation of their democratic regimes. In these countries, studies of traditional civil society and social networks still have much fruit to bear. Besides confirming already held perspectives, these studies will allow for new contextual realities to be integrated into past studies, which

will increase the robustness of or inspire revisions to the conclusions reached by researchers. Basically, there is still much to learn about social capital, social networks, and civil society in nondemocracies, new democracies, and consolidating democracies that cannot be learned in already consolidated democracies.

## Conclusion

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Individuals naturally associate with each other. Beyond simple, inconsequential interactions, people often seek out groups to join based on their preferences. The basis for joining can be religious, ethnic, political, and so forth. Associations can be in the form of environmental groups, bowling leagues, churches, political parties, neighborhood associations, social networking Internet sites, and the like. Groups are as varied as the people who compose their membership. However, even with the degree of variation that exists, there are certain consistent effects for individuals that derive from being a member of a group. These effects are conceived of as social capital. As members of groups, individuals build social capital by contributing to a system of generalized reciprocity in which other individuals, often members of the same group, will then return the effort that the individual contributed. That return may be in a similar context in which it was given. However, that return may also manifest itself in a unique context. Regardless, individuals desire to reciprocate what others have given. In this manner, social capital affects group and individual performance by inspiring trust and a desire to return the favor.

Social networks and civil society are broader concepts that focus more on the types and numbers of groups within a specific system (e.g., a country). Within social networks and civil society, social capital is exchanged and stored so as to affect individuals' attitudes and behavior. Social networks emerge as a less formal organization of individuals with common interests who, when acting together, can have a greater effect on the system. Civil society is the most aggregate concept and describes the number and intensity of social networks and other associations in a system. The strength of civil society is a broad conceptualization of the associational nature of a system that may affect much of the behavior of system-level actors.

The concepts of this chapter are most effective in countries with democratic regimes. In these participatory political systems, associations become another avenue of participation and can inspire or invite mobilization in the political system. Political participation shapes democratic governance, and associations can shape participation. Besides politics, a strong civil society can also affect the economy by encouraging efficiency and affecting general demographic conditions through educational attainment and reducing criminal tendencies of individuals in a community.

The academic endeavors of researchers have spanned the entire globe. While the context of research is highly

variable between developed and developing countries, the general consensus remains that social capital, social networks, and civil society are consistent concepts. The primary variation is the distinction between participatory and nonparticipatory political systems. Basically, systems that encourage individual input (i.e., democracy) cannot avoid influence by associations. That influence can be intense and broad, just as it can be subtle and specific. Only with continued research will those distinctions become obvious.

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