

# Civic Engagement in American Democracy



## Then and Now

America has long been known as an unusually civically engaged democracy, not only the world's first mass electoral democracy but also a country whose citizens form and participate in all kinds of voluntary associations. Today, many observers feel that American civic engagement is in decline. **What is happening and why?** The best way to answer these questions is to look back in history. By understanding how America became a highly civically engaged democracy in the first place, we can cast new light on changes since the 1970s. Theda Skocpol uses history to comment on the present, drawing on a major new research project tracing the emergence and development of voluntary membership associations from 1790 to the present.

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