

## Key terms + ideas

- civil society
- Pluralism vs. Corporatism
- “closed shop”
- “union shop”
- civic community
- “amoral familism”
- social capital
- “bridging” vs. “bonding” social capital

## Key questions

**Q: What is social capital? How does it “make democracy” work per Putnam?**

**A:** For Putnam, social capital is a feature of social organizations that facilitates a virtuous cycle of cooperation among citizens. This includes dimensions of these organizations like civic trust, norms of reciprocity, and networks of civic engagement. This cooperation allows citizens to effectively coordinate and act collectively. Fundamentally, Putnam argues that participation in civic groups, like the local football league or church choir, fosters trust and citizen participation which aids government effectiveness and democracy.

**Q: What is Putnam (1993) trying to explain? Where do these differences come from?**

**A:** Putnam (1993) seeks to understand why variation in Italian regional government effectiveness, or why some Italian regional governments performed better than others. He finds that regional governments in the north of the country tend to be more effective than those in the south.

His explanation, focusing on the role of social capital, argues that social capital is historically-rooted and path dependent. Tracing the roots of northern Italian comparatively high social capital to the medieval Republican governments in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, Putnam suggests that the North’s traditions of civic community are self-reinforcing. So, medieval politics affects today’s governance because social capital is path dependent, or once people learn to cooperate (or not) they continue to do so. In the south of Italy, however, Putnam argues autocratic governments erased social capital which according to Putnam made and makes southern Italian regional governments less effective.

**Q: According to our authors this week, is social capital always good for democracy? Why?**

**A:** According to Putnam and Varshney, social capital is always good for democracy because it promotes government efficacy and reduces ethnic conflict if the corresponding civil society is ethnically integrated. Both authors fundamentally argue that strong civic associations bridge divides across societies. Berman, meanwhile, takes the opposite approach by showing the dark side of social capital. Using the example of Nazi Germany’s rise, she demonstrates how a robust civil society in Germany undermined the democratic political regime’s stability by deepening existing cleavages within German society.

## Week's readings

- Putnam, Making Democracy Work, Chs 1, 3-6.
- Varshney, "Ethnic Conflict and Civil Society: India and Beyond." World Politics 53 (April 2001), 362-98.
- Berman, "Civil Society and the Collapse of the Weimar Republic," World Politics 49 (April 1997), 401-429.

## Review questions

Check your understanding of this week's material and key ideas with the following questions.

1. What is Putnam (1993) trying to explain? How would other theories explain what he observes?
2. How do different types of civil society organizations affect the prospects of ethnic violence? Is a robust civil society always good for ethnic peace?
3. Do you agree with Putnam about social capital's path dependent nature? Why? Outline your reasoning.
4. How is Berman's conception of associationism distinct from Varshney and Putnam's definition of social capital?