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**Social Capital & Trust,
mobilization and demobilization in modern democracies**

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**The Religious Roots of Civil Society:
Western Europe in the Age of Mass Politics, 1870s-1970s**

This paper addresses the problem of the sources of civil society. What makes people form, affiliate and engage in activities in voluntary associations? I develop a new theory of the origins of civil society by focusing on a comparison of popular sector/lower class associations of urban and rural populations in a set of Western European countries during the period of the 1870s-1970s. The countries under study are Sweden, Norway, Austria (very strong civil societies); Germany, Netherlands, Belgium (strong civil societies); Britain (medium strength civil society); Italy, France (weak civil societies); Spain and Portugal (very weak civil societies).

I argue that patterns of civil society in Western Europe between the late 19th century to the late 20th century were shaped by state-church relations during the process of modernization. The more the church has put a territorial barrier to state expansion, the less likely was that the state developed a strong capacity. If state and church elites were allies in the process of nation building, the easier would be to achieve national territorial unification. This was achieved through two forms. First, states would be able to have a uniform jurisdiction over the territory, in terms of legal framework, police surveillance and channels of communication. This allowed for an early nationalization of politics, in the sense that individual and groups identities would be much determined by national level political issues. In this sense, strong states by successfully creating a unified school system, common systems of taxation, mass conscription and widespread communication networks indirectly fostered the development of national level voluntary associations. Since high capacity states are more able to impose a uniform jurisdiction and control over a territory, they will more easily to recognize voluntary associations representing the interests of popular sectors demanding political recognition, because these pressures will not be seen as an attack on the integrity of the state.

Also, the more the state had used the church resources, personnel, and apparatus for the implementation of policies, especially in welfare provision (relief funds, schooling) and work related issues (salaries, pensions) the more these institutional configurations would be used as background for the inclusion of modern voluntary associations in national level partnerships with state in the context of state economic modernization of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. State-capacity was enhanced when states could rely on a tradition of partnerships with religious bodies since the seventeenth-century. This constituted an institutional legacy, which made states more willing to empower voluntary associations. Political elites and state-builders would recognize corporate-religious bodies and groups as legitimate and integrate them, in the context of heightened international military and economic competition of the 1870s-1930s, in policy making networks for the dispensation of military, welfare and economic policies. This promoted the recognition of the autonomy and self-administration of voluntary associations.