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THE ONGOING DISCUSSION of civic engagement includes something for everyone. At the programmatic level, conservatives applaud a means of addressing societal problems that does not involve the coercive power of government, while liberals appreciate voluntaristic approaches as the principal ones available at a time when popular support for activist government is at a low ebb. At the philosophical level, communitarians are gratified by any increased recognition of the need for people to meet their civic obligations, while their liberal adversaries can acknowledge civic engagement as a means of generating the social capital that furthers the welfare of individuals. Finally, those of us who work on the intermediate social scientific level are intrigued by hypotheses relating temporal changes in social relations to the welfare of societies. Moreover, there is room in the discussion for more of us than usual: the relevance of history, sociology, and to a lesser degree political science is clear, but even economists—like liberal political philosophers—can recognize an argument for enlightened self-interest buried beneath the unfamiliar terminology.

To be sure, some look skeptically on the current preoccupation with civic engagement and social capital. Where are the dependent variables,

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