PART TWO

CONSEQUENCES OF SOCIAL CAPITAL
Democracy relies on the willingness and competence of citizens to be involved in political decision-making processes. From Pericles onwards, virtually every political theorist considered a lack of interest in politics among citizens as a burden on democracy. Without a minimum level of curiosity about issues of a political nature, citizens would not have the awareness regarding the opportunities available to them to articulate their interests and to contribute to collective decision-making. Politically involved citizens will be more informed than their less-involved counterparts, their attitudes and expectations will be more consistent, and they will be more willing to actually engage in political decision-making procedures. The debate is about the degree of involvement in democratic systems—not about the requirement of citizens’ involvement (cf. Berelson et al. 1954: 307; Almond and Verba 1963: 474–9; Barber 1984: 117).

Usually political involvement among citizens is explained using socio-structural factors (such as education, age, and gender) and socio-cultural factors (such as value orientations and efficacy) at the individual-level. Yet well-documented cross-national differences regarding the levels of political involvement in several countries cannot be explained in this way. Two strategies have been developed to deal with this puzzle. Firstly, social capital—broadly defined as networks and opportunities to mobilize resources—is presumed to solve many problems, including a lack of political involvement among citizens, combining socio-structural and socio-cultural factors. Mainly relying on Tocquevillian arguments, many authors argue that social capital implies greater concern about collective problems and opportunities among citizens. Cross-national