

Humphrey School of Public Affairs

Civic Engagement in America: Will the 2008 Election Matter?

Pundits and social observers have voiced alarm as fewer and fewer Americans involve themselves in voluntary groups and participatory democracy. Most of the nonprofit groups launched in recent decades are run by professionals who lobby Congress or deliver social services to clients. These professionally managed agencies have displaced membership groups, leaving regular Americans with fewer opportunities to interact across class lines and to get involved in community and public affairs. America's struggle to rebound from today's financial crises will require not only a turnaround of our economy but also a recovery for our civic life. In the wake of the 2008 election and the innovative Obama campaign, what are the prospects for a sustained revitalization of our civic democracy?



THEDA SKOCPOL

Theda Skocpol is the Victor S. Thomas Professor of Government and Sociology at Harvard University, where she served as Director of the Center for American Political Studies (1999 to 2006) and as Dean of the Graduate School of Arts and Sciences (2005 to 2007). Skocpol is recognized as one of the most cited and widely influential scholars in the modern social sciences; her work has contributed to the study of comparative politics, American politics, comparative and historical sociology, U.S. history, and the study of public policy. Skocpol's current research focuses on civic engagement, governmental transformation, and reform politics in the United States and on the development of U.S. social and educational policies in historical and comparative perspective.

Skocpol writes both for scholarly outlets and publications appealing to the educated public. The author of nine books, ten edited collections, and more than a hundred articles, her most recent books include, *What a Mighty Power We Can Be: African American Fraternal Groups and the Struggle for Racial Equality* (with Ariane Liazos and Marshall Ganz, 2006, winner of the Oliver Cromwell Cox Award); and *The Transformation of American Politics* (co-edited with Paul

Pierson, 2007). Skocpol received a B.A. in 1969 from Michigan State University and a Ph.D. in 1975 from Harvard University.

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