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This article distinguishes two approaches to study the political role of corporations. On the one hand, North American scholars have primarily understood the link between business and politics through the lens of corporate political activity (CPA) looking at how firms influence government policy. On the other hand, European scholars have recently promoted an understanding of corporate social responsibility (CSR) emphasizing that firms often assume a political role because they increasingly provide public goods and become involved in multi-actor governance processes. This article contrasts both approaches and suggests that differences in the way the political role of corporations are understood can at least, in part, be explained by the distinct nature of European/North American management scholarship as well as by the political environment in both regions. It is also suggested that both perspectives share a number of commonalities and complement each other.

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