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# Rethinking Civil Society

## TOWARD DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION

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In this third wave of global democratization, no phenomenon has more vividly captured the imagination of democratic scholars, observers, and activists alike than “civil society.” What could be more moving than the stories of brave bands of students, writers, artists, pastors, teachers, laborers, and mothers challenging the duplicity, corruption, and brutal domination of authoritarian states? Could any sight be more awe-inspiring to democrats than the one they saw in Manila in 1986, when hundreds of thousands of organized and peaceful citizens surged into the streets to reclaim their stolen election and force Ferdinand Marcos out through nonviolent “people power”?

In fact, however, the overthrow of authoritarian regimes through popularly based and massively mobilized democratic opposition has not been the norm. Most democratic transitions have been protracted and negotiated (if not largely controlled from above by the exiting authoritarians). Yet even in such negotiated and controlled transitions, the stimulus for democratization, and particularly the pressure to complete the process, have typically come from the “resurrection of civil society,” the restructuring of public space, and the mobilization of all manner of independent groups and grassroots movements.<sup>1</sup>

If the renewed interest in civil society can trace its theoretical origins to Alexis de Tocqueville, it seems emotionally and spiritually indebted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau for its romanticization of “the people” as a force for collective good, rising up to assert the democratic will against a narrow and evil autocracy. Such images of popular

mobilization suffuse contemporary thinking about democratic change throughout Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa—and not without reason.

In South Korea, Taiwan, Chile, Poland, China, Czechoslovakia, South Africa, Nigeria, and Benin (to give only a partial list), extensive mobilization of civil society was a crucial source of pressure for democratic change. Citizens pressed their challenge to autocracy not merely as individuals, but as members of student movements, churches, professional associations, women's groups, trade unions, human rights organizations, producer groups, the press, civic associations, and the like.

It is now clear that to comprehend democratic change around the world, one must study civil society. Yet such study often provides a one-dimensional and dangerously misleading view. Understanding civil society's role in the construction of democracy requires more complex conceptualization and nuanced theory. The simplistic antinomy between state and civil society, locked in a zero-sum struggle, will not do. We need to specify more precisely what civil society is and is not, and to identify its wide variations in form and character. We need to comprehend not only the multiple ways it can serve democracy, but also the tensions and contradictions it generates and may encompass. We need to think about the features of civil society that are most likely to serve the development and consolidation of democracy. And, not least, we need to form a more realistic picture of the limits of civil society's potential contributions to democracy, and thus of the relative emphasis that democrats should place on building civil society among the various challenges of democratic consolidation.

### What Civil Society Is and Is Not

Civil society is conceived here as the *realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules*. It is distinct from "society" in general in that it involves citizens *acting collectively in a public sphere* to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable. Civil society is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state. Thus it excludes individual and family life, inward-looking group activity (e.g., for recreation, entertainment, or spirituality), the profit-making enterprise of individual business firms, and political efforts to take control of the state. Actors in civil society need the protection of an institutionalized legal order to guard their autonomy and freedom of action. Thus civil society not only restricts state power but legitimates state authority when that authority is based on the rule of law. When the state itself is lawless and contemptuous of individual and group

autonomy, civil society may still exist (albeit in tentative or battered form) if its constituent elements operate by some set of shared rules (which, for example, eschew violence and respect pluralism). This is the irreducible condition of its “civil” dimension.<sup>2</sup>

Civil society encompasses a vast array of organizations, formal and informal. These include groups that are: 1) *economic* (productive and commercial associations and networks); 2) *cultural* (religious, ethnic, communal, and other institutions and associations that defend collective rights, values, faiths, beliefs, and symbols); 3) *informational and educational* (devoted to the production and dissemination—whether for profit or not—of public knowledge, ideas, news, and information); 4) *interest-based* (designed to advance or defend the common functional or material interests of their members, whether workers, veterans, pensioners, professionals, or the like); 5) *developmental* (organizations that combine individual resources to improve the infrastructure, institutions, and quality of life of the community); 6) *issue-oriented* (movements for environmental protection, women’s rights, land reform, or consumer protection); and 7) *civic* (seeking in nonpartisan fashion to improve the political system and make it more democratic through human rights monitoring, voter education and mobilization, poll-watching, anticorruption efforts, and so on).

In addition, civil society encompasses “the ideological marketplace” and the flow of information and ideas. This includes not only independent mass media but also institutions belonging to the broader field of autonomous cultural and intellectual activity—universities, think tanks, publishing houses, theaters, film production companies, and artistic networks.

From the above, it should be clear that civil society is not some mere residual category, synonymous with “society” or with everything that is not the state or the formal political system. Beyond being voluntary, self-generating, autonomous, and rule-abiding, the organizations of civil society are distinct from other social groups in several respects. First, as emphasized above, civil society is concerned with *public* rather than private ends. Second, civil society *relates to the state* in some way but does not aim to win formal power or office in the state. Rather, civil society organizations seek from the state concessions, benefits, policy changes, relief, redress, or accountability. Civic organizations and social movements that try to change the nature of the state may still qualify as parts of civil society, if their efforts stem from concern for the public good and not from a desire to capture state power for the group per se. Thus peaceful movements for democratic transition typically spring from civil society.

A third distinguishing mark is that civil society encompasses *pluralism* and diversity. To the extent that an organization—such as a religious fundamentalist, ethnic chauvinist, revolutionary, or millenarian

movement—seeks to monopolize a functional or political space in society, claiming that it represents the only legitimate path, it contradicts the pluralistic and market-oriented nature of civil society. Related to this is a fourth distinction, *partialness*, signifying that no group in civil society seeks to represent the whole of a person's or a community's interests. Rather, different groups represent different interests.

Civil society is distinct and autonomous not only from the state and society at large but also from a fourth arena of social action, *political society* (meaning, in essence, the party system). Organizations and networks in civil society may form alliances with parties, but if they become captured by parties, or hegemonic within them, they thereby move their primary locus of activity to political society and lose much of their ability to perform certain unique mediating and democracy-building functions. I want now to examine these functions more closely.

### The Democratic Functions of Civil Society

The first and most basic democratic function of civil society is to provide “the basis for the limitation of state power, hence for the control of the state by society, and hence for democratic political institutions as the most effective means of exercising that control.”<sup>3</sup> This function has two dimensions: to monitor and restrain the exercise of power by democratic states, and to democratize authoritarian states. Mobilizing civil society is a major means of exposing the abuses and undermining the legitimacy of undemocratic regimes. This is the function, performed so dramatically in so many democratic transitions over the past two decades, that has catapulted civil society to the forefront of thinking about democracy. Yet this thinking revives the eighteenth-century idea of civil society as *in opposition* to the state and, as I will show, has its dangers if taken too far.<sup>4</sup>

Civil society is also a vital instrument for containing the power of democratic governments, checking their potential abuses and violations of the law, and subjecting them to public scrutiny. Indeed, a vibrant civil society is probably more essential for consolidating and maintaining democracy than for initiating it. Few developments are more destructive to the legitimacy of new democracies than blatant and pervasive political corruption, particularly during periods of painful economic restructuring when many groups and individuals are asked to sustain great hardships. New democracies, following long periods of arbitrary and statist rule, lack the legal and bureaucratic means to contain corruption at the outset. Without a free, robust, and inquisitive press and civic groups to press for institutional reform, corruption is likely to flourish.

Second, a rich associational life supplements the role of political parties in stimulating political participation, increasing the political efficacy and skill of democratic citizens, and promoting an appreciation

of the obligations as well as the rights of democratic citizenship. For too many Americans (barely half of whom vote in presidential elections), this now seems merely a quaint homily. A century and a half ago, however, the voluntary participation of citizens in all manner of associations outside the state struck Tocqueville as a pillar of democratic culture and economic vitality in the young United States. Voluntary “associations may therefore be considered as large free schools, where all the members of the community go to learn the general theory of association,” he wrote.<sup>5</sup>

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***“The democratization of local government goes hand in hand with the development of civil society.”***

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Civil society can also be a crucial arena for the development of other democratic attributes, such as tolerance, moderation, a willingness to compromise, and a respect for opposing viewpoints. These values and norms become most stable when they emerge through experience, and organizational participation in civil society provides important practice in political advocacy and contestation. In addition, many civic organizations (such as *Conciencia*, a network of women’s organizations that began in Argentina and has since spread to 14 other Latin American countries) are working directly in the schools and among groups of adult citizens to develop these elements of democratic culture through interactive programs that demonstrate the dynamics of reaching consensus in a group, the possibility for respectful debate between competing viewpoints, and the means by which people can cooperate to solve the problems of their own communities.<sup>6</sup>

A fourth way in which civil society may serve democracy is by creating channels other than political parties for the articulation, aggregation, and representation of interests. This function is particularly important for providing traditionally excluded groups—such as women and racial or ethnic minorities—access to power that has been denied them in the “upper institutional echelons” of formal politics. Even where (as in South America) women have played, through various movements and organizations, prominent roles in mobilizing against authoritarian rule, democratic politics and governance after the transition have typically reverted to previous exclusionary patterns. In Eastern Europe, there are many signs of deterioration in the political and social status of women after the transition. Only with sustained, organized pressure from below, in civil society, can political and social equality be advanced, and the quality, responsiveness, and legitimacy of democracy thus be deepened.<sup>7</sup>

Civil society provides an especially strong foundation for democracy when it generates opportunities for participation and influence at all levels of governance, not least the local level. For it is at the local level that the historically marginalized are most likely to be able to affect

public policy and to develop a sense of efficacy as well as actual political skills. The democratization of local government thus goes hand in hand with the development of civil society as an important condition for the deepening of democracy and the “transition from clientelism to citizenship” in Latin America, as well as elsewhere in the developing and postcommunist worlds.<sup>8</sup>

Fifth, a richly pluralistic civil society, particularly in a relatively developed economy, will tend to generate a wide range of interests that may cross-cut, and so mitigate, the principal polarities of political conflict. As new class-based organizations and issue-oriented movements arise, they draw together new constituencies that cut across longstanding regional, religious, ethnic, or partisan cleavages. In toppling communist (and other) dictatorships and mobilizing for democracy, these new formations may generate a modern type of citizenship that transcends historic divisions and contains the resurgence of narrow nationalist impulses. To the extent that individuals have multiple interests and join a wide variety of organizations to pursue and advance those interests, they will be more likely to associate with different types of people who have divergent political interests and opinions. These attitudinal cross-pressures will tend to soften the militancy of their own views, generate a more expansive and sophisticated political outlook, and so encourage tolerance for differences and a greater readiness to compromise.

A sixth function of a democratic civil society is recruiting and training new political leaders. In a few cases, this is a deliberate purpose of civic organizations. The Evelio B. Javier Foundation in the Philippines, for instance, offers training programs on a nonpartisan basis to local and state elected officials and candidates, emphasizing not only technical and administrative skills but normative standards of public accountability and transparency.<sup>9</sup> More often, recruitment and training are merely a long-term byproduct of the successful functioning of civil society organizations as their leaders and activists gain skills and self-confidence that qualify them well for service in government and party politics. They learn how to organize and motivate people, debate issues, raise and account for funds, craft budgets, publicize programs, administer staffs, canvass for support, negotiate agreements, and build coalitions. At the same time, their work on behalf of their constituency, or of what they see to be the public interest, and their articulation of clear and compelling policy alternatives, may gain for them a wider political following. Interest groups, social movements, and community efforts of various kinds may therefore train, toughen, and thrust into public notice a richer (and more representative) array of potential new political leaders than might otherwise be recruited by political parties. Because of the traditional dominance by men of the corridors of power, civil society is a particularly important base for the training and recruitment of women (and members of other marginalized groups) into positions of formal



political power. Where the recruitment of new political leaders within the established political parties has become narrow or stagnant, this function of civil society may play a crucial role in revitalizing democracy and renewing its legitimacy.

Seventh, many civic organizations have explicit democracy-building purposes that go beyond leadership training. Nonpartisan election-monitoring efforts have been critical in deterring fraud, enhancing voter confidence, affirming the legitimacy of the result, or in some cases (as in the Philippines in 1986 and Panama in 1989) demonstrating an opposition victory despite government fraud. This function is particularly crucial in founding elections like those which initiated democracy in Chile, Nicaragua, Bulgaria, Zambia, and South Africa. Democracy institutes and think tanks are working in a number of countries to reform the electoral system, democratize political parties, decentralize and open up government, strengthen the legislature, and enhance governmental accountability. And even after the transition, human rights organizations continue to play a vital role in the pursuit of judicial and legal reform, improved prison conditions, and greater institutionalized respect for individual liberties and minority rights.

Eighth, a vigorous civil society widely disseminates information, thus aiding citizens in the collective pursuit and defense of their interests and values. While civil society groups may sometimes prevail temporarily by dint of raw numbers (e.g., in strikes and demonstrations), they generally cannot be effective in contesting government policies or defending their interests unless they are well-informed. This is strikingly true in debates over military and national security policy, where civilians in developing countries have generally been woefully lacking in even the most elementary knowledge. A free press is only one vehicle for providing the public with a wealth of news and alternative perspectives. Independent organizations may also give citizens hard-won information about government activities that does not depend on what government says it is doing. This is a vital technique of human rights organizations: by contradicting the official story, they make it more difficult to cover up repression and abuses of power.

The spread of new information and ideas is essential to the achievement of economic reform in a democracy, and this is a ninth function that civil society can play. While economic stabilization policies typically must be implemented quickly, forcefully, and unilaterally by elected executives in crisis situations, more structural economic reforms—privatization, trade and financial liberalization—appear to be more sustainable and far-reaching (or in many postcommunist countries, only feasible) when they are pursued through the democratic process.

Successful economic reform requires the support of political coalitions in society and the legislature. Such coalitions are not spontaneous; they must be fashioned. Here the problem is not so much the scale,

autonomy, and resources of civil society as it is their distribution across interests. Old, established interests that stand to lose from reform tend to be organized into formations like state-sector trade unions and networks that tie the managers of state enterprises or owners of favored industries to ruling party bosses. These are precisely the interests that stand to lose from economic reforms that close down inefficient industries, reduce state intervention, and open the economy to greater domestic and international competition. The newer and more diffuse interests that stand to gain from reform—for example, farmers, small-scale entrepreneurs, and consumers—tend to be weakly organized and poorly informed about how new policies will ultimately affect them. In Asia, Latin America, and Eastern Europe, new actors in civil society—such as economic-policy think tanks, chambers of commerce, and economically literate journalists, commentators, and television producers—are beginning to overcome the barriers to information and organization, mobilizing support for (and neutralizing resistance to) reform policies.

Finally, there is a tenth function of civil society—to which I have already referred—that derives from the success of the above nine. “Freedom of association,” Tocqueville mused, may, “after having agitated society for some time, . . . strengthen the state in the end.”<sup>10</sup> By enhancing the accountability, responsiveness, inclusiveness, effectiveness, and hence legitimacy of the political system, a vigorous civil society gives citizens respect for the state and positive engagement with it. In the end, this improves the ability of the state to govern, and to command voluntary obedience from its citizens. In addition, a rich associational life can do more than just multiply demands on the state; it may also multiply the capacities of groups to improve their own welfare, independently of the state. Effective grassroots development efforts may thus help to relieve the burden of expectations fixed on the state, and so lower the stakes of politics, especially at the national level.

### Features of a Democratic Civil Society

Not all civil societies and civil society organizations have the same potential to perform the democracy-building functions cited above. Their ability to do so depends on several features of their internal structure and character.

One concerns the goals and methods of groups in civil society. The chances to develop stable democracy improve significantly if civil society does not contain maximalist, uncompromising interest groups or groups with antidemocratic goals and methods. To the extent that a group seeks to conquer the state or other competitors, or rejects the rule of law and the authority of the democratic state, it is not a component of civil society at all, but it may nevertheless do much damage to

democratic aspirations. Powerful, militant interest groups pull parties toward populist and extreme political promises, polarizing the party system, and are more likely to bring down state repression that may have a broad and indiscriminate character, weakening or radicalizing the more democratic elements of civil society.

A second important feature of civil society is its level of organizational institutionalization. As with political parties, institutionalized interest groups contribute to the stability, predictability, and governability of a democratic regime. Where interests are organized in a structured, stable manner, bargaining and the growth of cooperative networks are facilitated. Social forces do not face the continual cost of setting up new structures. And if the organization expects to continue to operate in the society over a sustained period of time, its leaders will have more reason to be accountable and responsive to their constituency, and may take a longer-range view of the group's interests and policy goals, rather than seeking to maximize short-term benefits in an uncompromising manner.

Third, the internally democratic character of civil society itself affects the degree to which it can socialize participants into democratic—or undemocratic—forms of behavior. If the groups and organizations that make up civil society are to function as “large free schools” for democracy, they must function democratically in their internal processes of decision-making and leadership selection. Constitutionalism, representation, transparency, accountability, and rotation of elected leaders within autonomous associations will greatly enhance the ability of these associations to inculcate such democratic values and practices in their members.

Fourth, the more pluralistic civil society can become without fragmenting, the more democracy will benefit. Some degree of pluralism is necessary by definition for civil society. Pluralism helps groups in civil society survive, and encourages them to learn to cooperate and negotiate with one another. Pluralism within a given sector, like labor or human rights, has a number of additional beneficial effects. For one, it makes that sector less vulnerable (though at the possible cost of weakening its bargaining power); the loss or repression of one organization does not mean the end of all organized representation. Competition can also help to ensure accountability and representativeness by giving members the ability to bolt to other organizations if their own does not perform.

Finally, civil society serves democracy best when it is dense, affording individuals opportunities to participate in multiple associations and informal networks at multiple levels of society. The more associations there are in civil society, the more likely it is that they will develop specialized agendas and purposes that do not seek to swallow the lives of their members in one all-encompassing organizational

framework. Multiple memberships also tend to reflect and reinforce cross-cutting patterns of cleavage.

### Some Important Caveats

To the above list of democratic functions of civil society we must add some important caveats. To begin with, associations and mass media can perform their democracy-building roles only if they have at least some autonomy from the state in their financing, operations, and legal standing. To be sure, there are markedly different ways of organizing the representation of interests in a democracy. Pluralist systems encompass “multiple, voluntary, competitive, nonhierarchically ordered and self-determined . . . [interest associations] which are not specially licensed, recognized, subsidized, created or otherwise controlled . . . by the state.” Corporatist systems, by contrast, have “singular, noncompetitive, hierarchically ordered, sectorally compartmentalized, interest associations exercising representational monopolies and accepting (de jure or de facto) governmentally imposed limitations on the type of leaders they elect and on the scope and intensity of demands they routinely make upon the state.”<sup>11</sup> A number of northern European countries have operated a corporatist system of interest representation while functioning successfully as democracies (at times even better, economically and politically, than their pluralist counterparts). Although corporatist arrangements are eroding in many established democracies, important differences remain in the degree to which interest groups are competitive, pluralistic, compartmentalized, hierarchically ordered, and so on.

While corporatist-style pacts or contracts between the state and peak interest associations may make for stable macroeconomic management, corporatist arrangements pose a serious threat to democracy in transitional or newly emerging constitutional regimes. The risk appears greatest in countries with a history of authoritarian *state corporatism*—such as Mexico, Egypt, and Indonesia—where the state has created, organized, licensed, funded, subordinated, and controlled “interest” groups (and also most of the mass media that it does not officially own and control), with a view to cooptation, repression, and domination rather than ordered bargaining. By contrast, the transition to a democratic form of corporatism “seems to depend very much on a liberal-pluralist past,” which most developing and postcommunist states lack.<sup>12</sup> A low level of economic development or the absence of a fully functioning market economy increases the danger that corporatism will stifle civil society even under a formally democratic framework, because there are fewer autonomous resources and organized interests in society.

By coopting, preempting, or constraining the most serious sources of potential challenge to its domination (and thus minimizing the amount

of actual repression that has to be employed), a state-corporatist regime may purchase a longer lease on authoritarian life. Such regimes, however, eventually come under pressure from social, economic, and demographic forces. Successful socioeconomic development, as in Mexico and Indonesia, produces a profusion of authentic civil society groups that demand political freedom under law. Alternatively, social and economic decay, along with massive political corruption, weakens the hold of the authoritarian corporatist state, undermines the legitimacy of its sponsored associations, and may give rise to revolutionary movements like the Islamic fundamentalist fronts in Egypt and Algeria, which promise popular redemption through a new form of state hegemony.

Societal autonomy can go too far, however, even for the purposes of democracy. The need for *limits* on autonomy is a second caveat; paired with the first, it creates a major tension in democratic development. A hyperactive, confrontational, and relentlessly rent-seeking civil society can overwhelm a weak, penetrated state with the diversity and magnitude of its demands, leaving little in the way of a truly “public” sector concerned with the overall welfare of society. The state itself must have sufficient autonomy, legitimacy, capacity, and support to mediate among the various interest groups and balance their claims. This is a particularly pressing dilemma for new democracies seeking to implement much-needed economic reforms in the face of stiff opposition from trade unions, pensioners, and the state-protected bourgeoisie, which is why countervailing forces in civil society must be educated and mobilized, as I have argued above.

In many new democracies there is a deeper problem, stemming from the origins of civil society in profoundly angry, risky, and even anomic protest against a decadent, abusive state. This problem is what the Cameroonian economist Célestin Monga calls the “civic deficit”:

Thirty years of authoritarian rule have forged a concept of indiscipline as a method of popular resistance. In order to survive and resist laws and rules judged to be antiquated, people have had to resort to the treasury of their imagination. Given that life is one long fight against the state, the collective imagination has gradually conspired to craftily defy everything which symbolizes public authority.<sup>13</sup>

In many respects, a similar broad cynicism, indiscipline, and alienation from state authority—indeed from politics altogether—was bred by decades of communist rule in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union, though it led to somewhat different (and in Poland, much more broadly organized) forms of dissidence and resistance. Some countries, like Poland, Hungary, the Czech lands, and the Baltic states, had previous civic traditions that could be recovered. These countries have generally made the most progress (though still quite partial) toward reconstructing state authority on a democratic foundation while beginning

to constitute a modern, liberal-pluralist civil society. Those states where civic traditions were weakest and predatory rule greatest—Romania, Russia, the post-Soviet republics of Central Asia, and most of sub-Saharan Africa—face a far more difficult time, with civil societies still fragmented and emergent market economies still heavily outside the framework of law.

This civic deficit points to a third major caveat with respect to the positive value of civil society for democracy. Civil society must be autonomous from the state, but not alienated from it. It must be watchful but respectful of state authority. The image of a noble, vigilant, organized civil society checking at every turn the predations of a self-serving state, preserving a pure detachment from its corrupting embrace, is highly romanticized and of little use in the construction of a viable democracy.

A fourth caveat concerns the role of politics. Interest groups cannot substitute for coherent political parties with broad and relatively enduring bases of popular support. For interest groups cannot aggregate interests as broadly across social groups and political issues as political parties can. Nor can they provide the discipline necessary to form and maintain governments and pass legislation. In this respect (and not only this one), one may question the thesis that a strong civil society is strictly complementary to the political and state structures of democracy. To the extent that interest groups dominate, enervate, or crowd out political parties as conveyors and aggregators of interests, they can present a problem for democratic consolidation. To Barrington Moore's famous thesis, "No bourgeois, no democracy," we can add a corollary: "No coherent party system, no stable democracy." And in an age when the electronic media, increased mobility, and the profusion and fragmentation of discrete interests are all undermining the organizational bases for strong parties and party systems, this is something that democrats everywhere need to worry about.<sup>14</sup>

## Democratic Consolidation

In fact, a stronger and broader generalization appears warranted: the single most important and urgent factor in the consolidation of democracy is not civil society but political institutionalization. *Consolidation* is the process by which democracy becomes so broadly and profoundly legitimate among its citizens that it is very unlikely to break down. It involves behavioral and institutional changes that normalize democratic politics and narrow its uncertainty. This normalization requires the expansion of citizen access, development of democratic citizenship and culture, broadening of leadership recruitment and training, and other functions that civil society performs. But most of all, and most urgently, it requires political institutionalization.

Despite their impressive capacity to survive years (in some cases, a decade or more) of social strife and economic instability and decline, many new democracies in Latin America, Eastern Europe, Asia, and Africa will probably break down in the medium to long run unless they can reduce their often appalling levels of poverty, inequality, and social injustice and, through market-oriented reforms, lay the basis for sustainable growth. For these and other policy challenges, not only strong parties but effective state institutions are vital. They do not guarantee wise and effective policies, but they at least ensure that government will be able to make and implement policies of some kind, rather than simply flailing about, impotent or deadlocked.

Robust political institutions are needed to accomplish economic reform under democratic conditions. Strong, well-structured executives, buttressed by experts at least somewhat insulated from the day-to-day pressures of politics, make possible the implementation of painful and disruptive reform measures. Settled and aggregative (as opposed to volatile and fragmented) party systems—in which one or two broadly based, centrist parties consistently obtain electoral majorities or near-majorities—are better positioned to resist narrow class and sectoral interests and to maintain the continuity of economic reforms across successive administrations. Effective legislatures may sometimes obstruct reforms, but if they are composed of strong, coherent parties with centrist tendencies, in the end they will do more to reconcile democracy and economic reform by providing a political base of support and some means for absorbing and mediating protests in society. Finally, autonomous, professional, and well-staffed judicial systems are indispensable for securing the rule of law.

These caveats are sobering, but they do not nullify my principal thesis. Civil society can, and typically must, play a significant role in building and consolidating democracy. Its role is not decisive or even the most important, at least initially. However, the more active, pluralistic, resourceful, institutionalized, and democratic is civil society, and the more effectively it balances the tensions in its relations with the state—between autonomy and cooperation, vigilance and loyalty, skepticism and trust, assertiveness and civility—the more likely it is that democracy will emerge and endure.

## NOTES

This essay has evolved from a two-year research project on “Economy, Society, and Democracy” supported by the Agency for International Development, and from lectures and conference papers presented at the Kennedy School of Government, the Gorée Institute in Senegal, the Human Sciences Research Council in South Africa, and the Institute for a Democratic Alternative, also in South Africa. I am grateful to all those who made comments at these gatherings, as well as to Kathleen Bruhn for research assistance on an earlier draft.

1. Guillermo O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule*:

*Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986), ch. 5.

2. This conceptual formulation draws from a number of sources but has been especially influenced by Naomi Chazan. See in particular Chazan, "Africa's Democratic Challenge: Strengthening Civil Society and the State," *World Policy Journal* 9 (Spring 1992): 279-308. See also Edward Shils, "The Virtue of Civil Society," *Government and Opposition* 26 (Winter 1991): 9-10, 15-16; Peter Lewis, "Political Transition and the Dilemma of Civil Society in Africa," *Journal of International Affairs* 27 (Summer 1992): 31-54; Marcia A. Weigle and Jim Butterfield, "Civil Society in Reforming Communist Regimes: The Logic of Emergence," *Comparative Politics* 25 (October 1992): 3-4; and Philippe C. Schmitter, "Some Propositions about Civil Society and the Consolidation of Democracy" (Paper presented at a conference on "Reconfiguring State and Society," University of California, Berkeley, 22-23 April 1993).

3. Samuel P. Huntington, "Will More Countries Become Democratic?" *Political Science Quarterly* 99 (Summer 1984): 204. See also Seymour Martin Lipset, *Political Man* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1981), 52.

4. Bronislaw Geremek, "Civil Society Then and Now," *Journal of Democracy* 3 (April 1992): 3-12.

5. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2 vols. (New York: Vintage Books, 1945 [orig. publ. 1840]), 2:124.

6. María Rosa de Martini and Soffa de Pinedo, "Women and Civic Life in Argentina," *Journal of Democracy* 3 (July 1992): 138-46; and María Rosa de Martini, "Civic Participation in the Argentine Democratic Process," in Larry Diamond, ed., *The Democratic Revolution: Struggles for Freedom and Pluralism in the Developing World* (New York: Freedom House, 1992), 29-52.

7. Georgina Waylen, "Women and Democratization: Conceptualizing Gender Relations in Transition Politics," *World Politics* 46 (April 1994): 327-54. Although Waylen is correct that O'Donnell and Schmitter speak to the dangers of excessive popular mobilization during the transition, her criticism of the democracy literature as a whole for trivializing the role of civil society is unfairly overgeneralized and certainly inapplicable to work on Africa. Moreover, accepting her challenge to treat civil society as a centrally important phenomenon in democratization does not require one to accept her insistence on *defining* democracy to include economic and social rights as well as political ones.

8. Jonathan Fox, "Latin America's Emerging Local Politics," *Journal of Democracy* 5 (April 1994): 114.

9. Dette Pascual, "Organizing People Power in the Philippines," *Journal of Democracy* 1 (Winter 1990): 102-9.

10. Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 2:126.

11. Philippe C. Schmitter, "Still the Century of Corporatism?" in Wolfgang Streeck and Schmitter, eds., *Private Interest Government: Beyond Market and State* (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1984), 96, 99-100.

12. *Ibid.*, 126. See 102-8 for the important distinction between societal (democratic) and state corporatism.

13. Célestin Monga, "Civil Society and Democratization in Francophone Africa" (Paper delivered at Harvard University, 1994). This paper will appear in the same author's forthcoming French-language work, *Anthropologie de la colère: Société et démocratie en Afrique Noire* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1994).

14. Juan J. Linz, "Change and Continuity in the Nature of Contemporary Democracies," in Gary Marks and Larry Diamond, eds., *Reexamining Democracy: Essays in Honor of Seymour Martin Lipset* (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1992), 184-90.