

CIVIL SOCIETY: AN INEVITABLE PARTNER IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LOCAL COMMUNITIES IN YOUNG DEMOCRACIES

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Abstract

The classical democratization theories often ignore the importance of civil society in successful democratic consolidation emphasizing predominantly the importance of institutional consolidation and legislative reforms. However, institutions and legal norms are often empty shells in democratic consolidation if not promoted among political forces (representative and behavioural consolidation) and through consolidation of civil society and civic culture (attitudinal consolidation).

In this article we argue that the process of democratic consolidation has many dimensions and is result of specific ideographic circumstances. The cultural (political culture) and institutional dimension (institutional building) of democratic consolidation do not correspond and have different pace and scope of changes. That is because the cultural change is slow, reinforced by mentalities which are often not supportive towards new institutional principles and blueprints, legislative changes and official politics. In such discrepancy, the phenomenon is seen as unpredictable, as a gap between programs and realities, strategies and realization. The change is perceived as formal and successes are reversible.

In the emerging democracies such a gap is bridged by the activity of the civil society. Though the civil society is promoting democratic values and policies it cannot replace the main institutional skeleton of state (bureaucracy, political parties, etc.). It furthermore depends significantly on global programs and international support which subsequently might result in a strong bias toward isolation from society and the local priorities. The situation is paradoxical: the state and political elites are not ready to promote (democratic) changes and civil society organizations are marginalized to politically neutral subjects. In explaining conditions pertinent to a successful democratic consolidation, this article assesses if civil society has the capacity to promote changes of predominant social values in young democracies and induce an emergence of civic culture.

Keywords: *Democratic consolidation, Consolidation of civic culture and civil society, Civil society, Trust.*

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Introduction

In this article we will argue that democracy becomes sustainable and “the only game in town” (Linz and Stepan 1996 : 16) merely when it becomes consolidated at the level of civil society. The concept of civil society is hereby understood broader than a group of non-governmental organizations (which need to be formally established and are firmly structured) but is perceived as a wide range of organizations that are concerned with public issues (being made of civic, issue-oriented, religious, and educational interest groups and associations) (Diamond 1999 : 222). The civil society is thus understood as the intermediary associational realm of social life organized between state and family, made of organisations that are formed on a voluntary basis by citizens to protect their interests or shared values and, though bound by a legal order, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state (White 1994 : 379; Diamond 1999 : 221). It provides “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” (Huntington 1984 : 204). Similarly, Larry Diamond argued that the civil society plays primary role in checking, monitoring and keeping the government and institutions responsive to the public. Secondly, by insisting on transparency and by “restraining the exercise of power by the state and holding it accountable” (Diamond 1999 : 239-240; Tusalem 2007 : 364) civil society fights political corruption and nepotism in governance at the local or national levels, and keeps the government accountable and transparent. Civil-society organizations furthermore might stimulate political participation, what is particularly important in young democracies where political indifference and apathy are epidemic (Diamond 1999 : 242; Tusalem 2007 : 362). Fourthly, civil society organizations, by articulating and disseminating democratic principles and values, help to assert the rights and power of the people (Diamond 1999 : 244) and in this way make the elites and the mass public more committed to democracy. Lastly, civil society organizations cast competent future political leaders since they allow their members to learn how to organize and motivate people, publicize programs, reconcile conflicts and build alliances (Diamond 1999 : 245). Consequently, through those numerous functions, civil society organizations help consolidation of democracy in a number of ways.

Against earlier democratization theories of 1980s that gave primary emphasis to the role of elite in the regime transformation (O’Donnell et al. 1986) emphasizing that “democracies are created not by causes but by causers” (Huntington 1991 : 108), the civil society was recognized as the missing link in making democracy work (Putnam 1994; Diamond 1994; Fukuyama 2001; Inglehar and Welzel 2005). Civil society organizations are hereby understood as *fora* of interpersonal trust expression, playing an important role in both democratic transition and consolidation in a society that has been transforming its political system from authoritarian into democratic. The theoretical concept in this article applies Wolfgang Merkel’s four dimensions of the democratic consolidation: constitutional, representative and behavioural

consolidation, and finally, the consolidation of civic culture and civil society (Merkel and Puhle 1999; Merkel et al. 2003). In explaining conditions pertinent to a successful democratic consolidation, the consolidation of civic culture and civil society helps to understand what the role of subjective values and attitudes of citizens in the stability of democratic regimes is. In this article we will therefore claim democratisation efforts also need to be driven from the people at the lowest level of governance, i.e. in the local communities, in order for democratisation to be successful and sustainable. In the ethnically divided societies the emergence and consolidation of the civil society is even more relevant, because “democracy requires a public that is organized for democracy, socialized to its norms and values, and committed not just to its myriad narrow interests but to larger, common, ‘civic’, ends” (Diamond 1997 : 5). Though it does not seek to “govern the polity as a whole“ (Schmitter 1997 : 240) civil society is a relevant actor in a political process since it serves an important function in mobilizing pressure for political change through creation of organized social groups (Diamond 1997 : 8; Schmitter 1992). Civil society is able to serve as a mobilizing agent of political change in the transitional period or as a watchdog in a time of consolidation since “[c]ivil society organizations seek from the state concessions, benefits, policy changes, relief, redress, and accountability” (Diamond 1996 : 229). Since civil society organizations are capable of influencing different levels of government consequently the strengthening of civil society allows conversion of democratic forms into democratic substance (Carrothers 2002 : 7). However, for democratic consolidation to take place it is necessary that the civil society operationalises at the local, i.e. municipal level. This paper argues consequently that a specific set of values and behaviours needs to emerge and prevail in local communities in order to successfully consolidate young democracies of the region. Those values need to be articulated through informal forms of social interaction that indicate higher levels of interpersonal trust among citizens. Once the trust emerges in local communities, democracy is genuine, achieved from inside a society.

Democratic consolidation of civic culture and civil society

Among different and numerous institutions and actors that work together in a democracy, the role of civil society is very often marginally treated in the democratization literature. Whereas political elites, institutional and normative reforms do play a prevalent role in political, social and economic reforms, in the last two decades democratization theories started to take thorough account of emergence of civil society as playing a significant role in both democratic transition and democratic consolidation, at the same time allowing for a wider societal transformation (Diamond and Schmitter 1997; Merkel and Lauth 1998; Merkel et al. 2003).

Juan Linz and Alfred Stepan argued that democratic consolidation presupposes development of civil society. Those two prominent theoreticians of democratic

consolidation held that, given that a condition of a functioning state is secured, in order for a democracy to be consolidated, five other interconnected and mutually reinforcing conditions must emerge. These conditions, once met, result in five arenas of democratic consolidation: “[f]irst, the conditions must exist for the development of a free and lively *civil society*. Second, there must be a relatively autonomous *political society* that is made of institutions of a democratic political society – political parties, legislatures, elections, electoral rules, political leadership, and interparty alliances. Third, throughout the territory of the state all major political actors, especially the government and the state apparatus, must be effectively subjected to a *rule of law* that protects individual freedoms and associational life. Fourth, there must be a *state bureaucracy* that is usable by the new democratic government. Fifth, there must be an institutionalized *economic society*” (Linz and Stepan 1996 : 17).

Wolfgang Merkel suggested the sequence theory of democratic consolidation through four levels where the civil society plays a predominant role in the so called attitudinal consolidation. According to him, the democratization process starts with *constitutional consolidation*, which “refers to the key political, constitutionally established institutions, such as the head of state, the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government, and the electoral system. Collectively, they form the *macrolevel, the level of structures*” (Merkel 2008 : 15). The first democratization level, constitutional consolidation, being structural and macro-level component, as a rule is the first one to finish, and “it affects the second, third, and fourth levels through components of norms and penalties that facilitate or constrict action and thereby shape structures” (Merkel 2008). The second level of democratic consolidation, according to Merkel, is a stage of *representative consolidation*, and “concerns the territorial and functional representation of interests. In other words, it is primarily about parties and interest groups, or the *mesolevel of collective actors*” (Merkel 2008). Guillermo O’Donnell similarly claimed that a democracy is consolidated when “power is alternated between rivals, support for the system is continued during times of economic hardship, rebels are defeated and punished, the regime remains stable in the face of restructuring of the party system, and there exists no significant political anti-system” (O’Donnell 1996 : 12-13). The second level is followed by the level of *behavioural consolidation*, “where the ‘informal’ actors operate – the potentially political ones, such as the armed forces, major land owners, capital, business, and radical movements and groups. They make up a *second mesolevel*, that of informal political actors” (Merkel 2008). Merkel hereby recalled that success with *constitutional* and *representative* consolidation is “crucial in deciding whether the informal political actors with potential veto power will pursue their interests inside, outside, or against democratic norms and institutions” (Merkel 2008). Finally, “if the first three levels have been consolidated, they become seminal for the emergence of the civil society that stabilizes a democracy” (Merkel 2008). As a result, the fourth, *micro-level*, represents *the democratic consolidation of the political culture* and concludes with the emergence of a citizenship culture. Merkel considered the culture of citizenship as

“the sociocultural substructure of democracy” (Merkel 2008). However, the process of *the political culture consolidation* takes the longest to achieve. For example, political culture consolidation in the countries that became democracies in the second wave of democratization (Italy, Federal Republic of Germany, Austria, and Japan after 1945) took decades and, moreover, “can be sealed only by a generational change” (Merkel 2008). Along with the authoritarian tradition, the lack of democratic political culture in the post-communist countries has been discouraging the consolidation of democracy. Philippe Schmitter correspondingly underlined importance of political culture and social values in the process of democratic consolidation. He argued that a democracy is consolidated when “social relations become social values i.e. patterns of interaction can become so regular in their occurrence, so endowed with meaning, so capable of motivating behaviour that they become autonomous in their internal function and resistant to externally induced change” (Schmitter 1992). Václav Havel similarly acknowledged that democratic consolidation might require a generational change, arguing “while the formal establishment of democracy typically took only a matter of days, weeks or, at most, months, real democracy did not emerge easily. It is, indeed, an ongoing process, one that has not been completed even now. New generations, without the burdensome experience of life under totalitarianism, are only now emerging into adulthood. These new generations are only gradually moving into positions in the decision making process in their countries” (Havel 2011 : 6).

In another writing of his, Merkel put forward a shorter consolidation format, considering that “the process of democratic consolidation is best described as a sequence of three interlocking phases. It starts with structural consolidation (constitution, political institutions), influences the level of representative consolidation (intermediate organization of interests: parties, interest groups), in order to then bring about long term attitudinal consolidation (specific and diffuse support of citizens)” (Merkel 1996 : 3). With respect to attitudinal consolidation, Wolfgang Merkel and Hans-Joachim Lauth consider the existence of a civil society to be a requirement for democracy to emerge since its activities promote democratic values and civic culture by executing four functions: (1) it serves as a protection against arbitrary use of state power, it contributes to a balancing between state authority and society, (3) it serves as a political socialisation agent, educating about the democracy, (4) it serves as a means of public criticism of the state activities (Merkel and Lauth 1998 : 4-6). Manal A. Jamal similarly considered that “civil society can contribute to democracy in four central ways: (1) it counters state power, (2) it facilitates political participation by helping in the aggregation and representation of interests, (3) it serves as a political arena that could play an important role in the development of some of the necessary attributes for democratic development, and (4) more broadly, it plays an important role in furthering struggles for citizenship rights” (Jamal 2012 : 12).

Prerequisites for the consolidation of civil society

Robert Putnam's conceptualization of the civil society as being made of the dense networks of associational life that bound communities together and promote norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness (Putnam 1994) will be operationalized in this article. Interpersonal trust is particularly important in pluralistic societies, where different communities, diverse either in political affiliations, membership or support to various interest groups or by belonging to different ethnic groups, are becoming more and more interdependent. Since society cannot be maintained in the case where there are strong value conflicts present, the very existence of interpersonal trust helps to facilitate life in diverse societies. It fosters tolerance and acceptance of the plurality of ideas, interests and attitudes. In words of Joerg Forbrig, civil society is "an important agent to anchor a democratic political culture in the broader populace" (Forbrig 2002). Such democratic political culture is "characterised by attitudes of tolerance, pragmatism, trust, willingness to compromise, and civility. On the behavioural level, these attitudinal dispositions translate into a pattern of moderation, cooperation, bargaining, and accommodation" (Diamond 1993). Consequently, existence of interpersonal trust has implications in the political sphere, allowing citizens to join forces in interest groups and political parties, since trust enables them to come together in citizen's initiatives more easily.

As Lucian Pye notes, "[p]olitics rests upon collective actions which in turn depend upon a basic spirit of trust and a capacity for cooperation. At the same time politics involves conflict and competition. Cultures must therefore strike an acceptable balance between cooperation and competition, and the capacity of political cultures to manage this problem usually depends on how the basic socialization process handles the problems of mutual trust and distrust in personality development" (Pye 1968). American political scientists Almond and Verba back in 1963 demonstrated that in those countries where a greater proportion of interpersonal trust exists, democracy has historically worked well (Almond and Verba 1963 : 33). That is, according to them, because interpersonal trust resulting in relationships formation leads to a sense of cooperation which in turn creates stable democracy. Therefore, one of the most basic of the supportive attitudes and values for democracy to prosper is that a population needs to share a sense of interpersonal trust. This connection has been further elaborated in the works of numerous political and social scientists, who confirmed the causal relationship between socio-cultural factors and the performance of democratic political institutions. For example, Roland Inglehart argued that interpersonal trust is an enduring cultural syndrome conducive to the viability of democracy (Inglehart 1990 : 1211; Inglehart 2001, see also Offe 1999). He explains that "trust is not a fixed genetic characteristic: it is cultural, shaped by the historical experiences of given peoples and subject to change" (Inglehart 1990 : 1211). He was the pioneering sociologist in establishing that a broader process of cultural change is gradually transforming political, economic, and social life in advanced industrial

societies as younger generations gradually replace older ones in the adult population (Inglehart 1977). Undertaking numerous research efforts on value orientations world-wide, Inglehart also surveyed the role of civic culture in the development of democracy, measuring it with three variables: interpersonal trust, life satisfaction, and percentage of people who support revolutionary change. His survey results indicated that, since cultural values are stable and enduring, substantial and consistent cross-cultural variations prevail, and that in those nations that are characterized by high levels of life satisfaction, interpersonal trust, tolerance, etc., maintenance of democratic institutions is more likely than those whose publics lacked such attitudes (Inglehart 1990).

However, although “interpersonal trust is a prerequisite to the formation, trust alone is not sufficient to support stable mass democracy. A long-term commitment to democratic institutions among the public is also required, in order to sustain democracy when conditions are dire” (Inglehart 1988 : 1205). Robert Putnam established a strong link between the performance of political institutions and the character of the civic community (Putnam 1999 : 15). Other authors argued that the output of national institutions helps to generate interpersonal trust and tolerance or encourages citizen’s associational involvement (Rothstein and Stolle 2008; Kumlin and Rothstein 2005). Robert Dahl similarly considered that political beliefs of citizens do withstand democracy if people believe in the legitimacy of the institutions (Dahl 197 : 132).

More diversity often leads to less trust. As a rule, modern states are pluralistic, the fact of ethnic diversity might constitute a barrier for social capital with regard to trust at the community level (Delhey and Newton 2005; Anderson and Paskeviciute 2006). Putnam’s research similarly showed that social trust and networks of civic engagement appear to be negatively associated with ethnic diversity at the community level (Putnam 2007, see also Letki 2008; Costa and Kahn 2003). Andreas Wimmer argued the unsuccessful regime change is often conditioned by improper inter-ethnic relations. He argued that in those cases “[w]here states were too weak to overcome indirect rule and communal self-government, to penetrate a society or override other bonds of loyalty and solidarity, and where a network of civil society organisation had not yet developed, ethnicity was quickly politicised and politics turned into a matter of ethnic justice [i.e., bitter competition among ethnic groups]. The timing of the two processes – state modernization and the rise of civil society – and the values reached on each scale therefore explain whether the ethnicised or the fully nationalized versions of state formation prevail” (Wimmer 2002 : 79). It is established that a civic identity is more prone to formation of trust than a national one. For example, Mikael Hjerm and Linda Berg researched comparatively how two forms of collective national identity (ethnic and civic) affect individual political trust and concluded that a strong civic national identity has positive impact on political trust whereas a strong ethnic national identity has negative impact on political trust (Hjerm and Berg

2010). Finally, pursuit of the principle of equality by the institutions helps to overcome the barriers of particularized trust in diverse societies and enhance generalized trust (Rothstein and Stolle 2008).

Finally, economic development is closely linked with the level of interpersonal trust: the people of rich societies show higher levels of interpersonal trust than in poorer ones (Inglehart 1999). Seymour Martin Lipset established the relationship between high levels of economic development and democracy (Lipset 1959 : 1994) and Huntington acknowledged the economic component of democratisation, arguing that “most wealthy countries are democratic and most democratic countries are wealthy” (Huntington 1991 : 21). In addition to economic affluence, “modernization leads to enduring mass attitudinal changes that are conducive to democracy (Inglehart and Welzel 2010)”. Welzel, Inglehart and Klingemann argued however that the intertwined combination of (i) socioeconomic development, (ii) along with emancipative cultural change and (iii) democratization lead a social progress. Namely, “[s]ocioeconomic development gives people the objective means of choice by increasing individual resources; rising emancipative values strengthen people’s subjective orientation towards choice; and democratization provides legal guarantees of choice by institutionalizing freedom rights” (Welzel et al. 2003).

Development of local civic communities in young democracies through the activities of Civil Society Organizations

Putnam holds that trust and associational membership are sources of social trust. According to him, “social trust and civic engagement are strongly correlated; the greater the density of associational membership in a society, the more trusting its citizens” (Putnam 1995 : 73). His theory of social capital proved that rich and dense associational networks facilitate the underlying conditions of interpersonal trust, tolerance and cooperation, providing the social foundations for a vibrant democracy (Putnam 2000). He understands social capital as “connections among individuals – social networks” (i.e. signifying a structural phenomenon) and as “the norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them” (those being social norms, i.e. cultural phenomenon and signifying a cultural phenomenon) (Putnam 2000 : 19). Though Putnam acknowledged that “social capital is closely related to what some have called ‘civic virtue’” he warned that “civic virtue is most powerful when embedded in a sense network of reciprocal social relations. A society of many virtuous but isolated individuals is not necessarily rich in social capital” (Putnam 2000 : 19). Putnam argues that a kind of trust that he labels as a ‘thin trust’, built by generalized mutual reciprocity, is the core of social capital, because it nurtures newly formed networks and chances of new associations beyond daily friendship, which arise out of a ‘thick trust’, which is derived from personal experiences (Putnam 2000 : 19). According to Putnam, “a dense network of secondary associations both embodies

and contributes to effective social collaboration” (Putnam 1995 : 90). Moreover, the engagement in civic associations contributes to the democratic consolidation since it enhances a shared responsibility, and increases ability and inclination toward collaboration and cooperation. Interaction is directly linked to enabling people in building communities, committing to each other, and the knitting of the social fabric (Beem 1999 : 20).

The civic engagement implies active participation in public affairs. Being interested in public issues and prepared to be involved in debates and common activities are important signs of civic virtue. There are four central themes which regard participation in the civic community (Putnam 1993 : 87-91). A civic community needs to entail equal rights and obligations for all. Putnam explains that “such a community is bound together by horizontal relations of reciprocity and cooperation, not by vertical relations of authority and dependency. Citizens interact as equals, not as patrons and clients, nor as governors and petitioners. [...] The more that politics approximates to the ideal of political equality among citizens following norms of reciprocity and engaged in self-government, the more civic that community may be said to be.” (Putnam 1993 : 88). Participatory civic community implies virtuous citizens that are “helpful, and trustful to one another, even when they differ on matters of substance” (Putnam 1993 : 88-89). Such a community is characterized by dialogue, respect for the other and recognition that we are dependent on each other in various ways. And, finally, by stressing that the norms and values of the civic community “are embodied in, and reinforced by, distinctive social structures and practices” (Putnam 1993 : 89).

By strengthening the participation of the citizens in the political processes through their involvement into civic associations, democratic structures at local level are being enhanced and strengthened. It is primarily considered that “[c]ivil society participation in public policy processes and in policy dialogues leads to inclusive and effective policies, if conjugated with adequate allocation of resources and sound management” (European Commission 2012 : 6). In order to strengthen democracy at the local level citizen associations need to feel invited to cooperate in local decision-making processes and policy planning and to be able to propose joint initiatives with local authorities. Thus, a dialogue between local authorities and civil society organizations should be promoted particularly at the local level, as civil society organizations “guarantee useful entry points for policy input in decentralised contexts. This enhances the responsiveness of national policies to local realities.” Besides, civil society organizations also help to “mobilise local resources and social capital, share information and bring marginalised groups into play, thus helping improve local governance and territorial cohesion” (European Commission 2012 : 7). Secondly, civil society organizations furthermore “play a role in boosting domestic accountability at local and national levels through a free, clear, accessible flow of information. They can contribute to nurturing respect for the rule of law by monitoring effective implementation of laws and policies and they can initiate and support anti-corruption

efforts” (European Commission 2012 : 7). Thirdly, civil society organizations “play an important role in service delivery, complementing local and national government provision and piloting innovative projects. Their capacity to identify needs, address neglected issues and human rights concerns, and mainstream services to populations that are socially excluded or out of reach is particularly important” (European Commission 2012 : 8). Fourthly, civil society organizations work for inclusive and sustainable growth as they “have increasingly become active players in the economic realm, with initiatives having an impact on local economy or by monitoring repercussions of national and international economic policies” (European Commission 2012 : 9).

Conclusions

We have in this paper investigated prerequisites for the consolidation of civil society and researched importance of the development of civil society in the local communities of the young democracies. Putnam’s argument that “democratic government is strengthened, not weakened, when it faces a vigorous civil society” (Putnam 1994 : 182) has been endorsed to demonstrate that local political, cultural and socio-economic contexts play a role in democratic consolidation of young democracies. By recognizing that trust is an inevitable variable for emergence of civil society, we demonstrated that through engagement of citizens in civic associations, people develop skills of cooperation, a sense of shared responsibility for collective endeavours and a means of engaging with broader political systems. Apart from contributing to creation of citizen’s associations, interpersonal trust and social capital influences a complexity of attitudes and behaviours towards public affairs and institutions. Vigilant citizens require a vigilant administration. By empowering local civil society organizations in their actions for democratic governance it is reasonable to expect that local governments will be more accountable, be willing to modernise their administrations, introduce transparent financial management and improve the quality of their service provision. Lastly, since local authorities are often more severely affected by the economic problems of the country than the central government, it is necessary to set up a functional administrative system that is capable of providing funds allowing for functioning of the cities, towns and municipalities.

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