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**CIVIL SOCIETY AS A GAME CHANGER:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICAL TRANSITIONS  
IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

by

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December 2013

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**CIVIL SOCIETY AS A GAME CHANGER:  
A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF POLITICAL TRANSITIONS  
IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study examines the role civil society has played in bringing about political change in the totalitarian regimes of the former Communist Bloc in Eastern Europe and the authoritarian states challenged by the Arab Spring. Specifically, this thesis creates a list of criteria for evaluating the presence of a good (meaning vibrant and liberal) or bad (meaning anti-democratic and non-liberal) civil society, and uses these criteria to predict the long term prospects of democratization in the four countries studied: Poland, Russia, Tunisia, and Egypt. The study finds that the presence of a good civil society or the majority of its criteria enhances the prospects of democratization in countries undergoing political transitions, while the lack of all or most of its criteria significantly decreases the likelihood that a democratic system will take root.

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

CDA	Community Development Associations
CNLT	National Council on Liberties in Tunisia
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CRZZ	Communist Trade Union
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
ETUF	Egyptian Trade Union Federation
FNPR	Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia
KKP	National Coordinating Commission
KOR	Committee for the Defense of Workers
KOS	Committees for Social Resistance
KO'S'	Solidarity Citizens' Committee
LTDH	Tunisian Human Rights League
MHG	Moscow Helsinki Group
MKS	Inter-Factory Strike Committee
MOSA	Ministry of Social Affairs
MTG	Moscow Trust Group
MTI	Islamic Tendency Movement
NDP	National Democratic Party
NGOs	Non- Governmental Organizations
NPG	Independent Miners' Union
NSTJ	National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists
OFT	United Workers Front
OKP	All-Poland Committee of Peace
OPZZ	All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions
PCG	Press Club Glasnost
PSD	Destourian Socialist Party
PZPR	Polish United Workers' Party
RCD	Democratic Constitutional Rally
RSFSR	Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic
SOK	Union of Associated Cooperatives

Sotsprof	Association of Socialist Trade Unions
UGET	General Union for Tunisian Students
UGTT	Tunisian General Labor Union
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
VKP	General Confederation of Trade Unions
VOOP	All-Russian Society for Conservation
VTsSPS	All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions
WiP	Freedom and Peace Movement
ZSL	United Peasants' Party

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## I. INTRODUCTION

In the wake of the uprisings in the Arab world a lot has been argued about the seeds of democracy finally taking root in the Middle East and North Africa. Western governments, enthusiastic over the events of the Arab Spring, envisioned a new wave of democracy spreading across the region. This initial outburst of enthusiasm, however, has cooled off considerably since the events of 2010 and 2011, as the transitioning Arab countries encounter serious difficulties on their way to democracy.

Academics and policy makers continue to debate the conditions and necessary factors for successful transition from autocracy to democracy. One method of better understanding this process of transition is to compare cases across time and space. Eastern Europe, which went through the process of democratization in the 1990s, is a useful set of cases for comparing the conditions under which democracy takes root with the current uprising of popular revolts in the Middle East and their potential for democratic transition. Both regions experienced mass-based revolts and demands for democracy. Similarly, both regions languished under decades-long autocracies. Furthermore, some countries in Eastern Europe made the transition to democracy more easily and quickly than others, while some countries continue to struggle with embracing basic democratic principles; the same pattern appears to be taking shape within the Middle East as well.

In the wake of Eastern European democratic transitions one factor in particular has received considerable attention in Western academic circles: a free and lively civil society. Academia now widely acknowledges that without the presence of a vibrant civil society, a democratic system is less likely to take root in transitioning societies. This becomes especially important with regard to the revolts of the Arab Spring. As recent events in Egypt have shown, if power-holders are largely left unchecked by the autonomous forces of a vibrant civil society, the adage “one man, one vote, one time” might easily become reality.

Recognizing the need to conduct cross-regional studies in order to enhance the efficiency of democracy promotion initiatives, this thesis focuses on the study of civil society and its effects on the process of democratic transition. Specifically, it will address the following questions:

- How does civil society influence democratic transition?
- Are all forms of civil society useful for democratic transition, or are some forms more valuable than others?
- Are there types of civil society that actually inhibit the transition to democracy and, if so, what are they?
- Are Eastern European conceptions of civil society applicable to the Middle East? If not, how can a comparative basis be established in order to conduct a cross-regional study?

#### **A. METHOD OF INQUIRY**

Based on democratic transition literature, the thesis begins by constructing a framework to compare and analyze cases of democratic transition in Eastern Europe and in the Middle East, following the Arab Spring. The thesis will also draw on the literature to provide definitions of democracy, democratization, and civil society, based on certain characteristics. Furthermore, the thesis will draw from academic literature to propose a causal relationship between democratization and civil society. Exploring civil society and how it affects democratization, may give further insight into the role that certain types of civil society play in democratic transition. In addition, factors contributing to the emergence of civil society, or factors blocking its emergence, will be explored.

This framework will then be applied in looking at case studies of democratic transition in Eastern Europe. Specifically, the thesis will conduct four case studies of countries with different degrees of success in democratization. For Eastern Europe, the thesis will investigate Poland, a country that has arguably traversed the process of democratic transition, and Russia, a country that continues to founder in its move to democracy. These case studies will test the hypotheses regarding the role of civil society in the successful or incomplete transition to democracy in these countries. The thesis then considers two cases in the Middle East: Tunisia, which has made considerable strides

towards successful democratization; and Egypt, which appears to be sliding back into less democratic practices since the overthrow of Mubarak in 2011.

From the literature on democratic transition, the thesis tests the following hypotheses:

*Hypothesis 1:*

The lack of a vibrant civil society, other things being equal, prohibits the emergence of viable democratic systems. In other words, the stronger civil society, the greater the chances democracy will take root in countries undergoing democratic transition.

*Hypothesis 2:*

The more autonomous a civil society is from the state, the more civil society can foster the development of democracy.

*Hypothesis 3:*

The more integrated a civil society is across regional, ethnic, and class boundaries, the more civil society can foster the development of democracy.

*Hypothesis 4:*

The greater a civil society's ability to take advantage of political opportunity "holdovers" (such as, a history of civil society and/or democratic practices), the more civil society can foster the development of democracy.

Ultimately this thesis finds that introducing the concepts of a good (meaning vibrant and liberal) and bad (meaning anti-democratic and non-liberal) civil society enables the conduct of cross-regional studies between Eastern Europe and the Middle East specifically. It also finds that a vibrant civil society based on the active participation of its members, the empowerment of civil societal organizations (CSOs) vis-à-vis the state, the autonomy of CSOs from the state or religious authorities, the beneficial effects of a wide range of cross-cutting cleavages in society, the presence of political opportunity "holdovers," and adherence to the basic norms of civility, including trust, cooperation, reciprocity, and tolerance, significantly increases the prospects of democratic transition and reduces the risks of an authoritarian reversal. On the other hand, a bad civil society

lacking most of these traits is likely to reproduce the authoritarian patterns of regime behavior. Finally, while not giving an answer to the relative weights of each of these criteria in terms of promoting democratization, the study demonstrates that due to the absence of the self-restraining concept of civil society, in the Middle East civility and its underlying values become a crucial factor for the emergence of a good civil society.

Chapter II begins by providing a short overview on the debate surrounding the different conceptions of civil society. It provides a working definition of civil society that is centered on the idea of grassroots associational and collective activism located within the public space delimited by the family, political society and the state. Based on a list of six objective criteria, the thesis then introduces the concept of a vibrant civil society that promotes democratic transformation and a bad civil society, which largely reproduces patterns of authoritarian behavior.

The study tests these criteria by analyzing four case studies, two in Eastern Europe and two in the greater Middle East. Chapter III analyzes the political transformation in Poland in the late 1980s, and finds that the presence of all the criteria of a good civil society significantly contributed to the relatively smooth process of democratization in the country. Chapter IV examines the political transition in Russia in the period leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and finds that civil society was severely lacking in most characteristics of a good civil society, which hindered the emergence of a viable democratic system.

Chapters V and VI focus on two countries that were significantly affected by the uprisings of the Arab Spring. An analysis of Tunisia in Chapter V finds that the traits of a good civil society outweigh the presence of the criteria of a bad civil society, which has helped the country to become a prime candidate for democratization in the region. On the other hand, in the case of Egypt (Chapter VI), the study finds that, as long as the advocates of a good civil society remain in the minority, the predominance of bad civil society renders the prospects of democratization dim.

Chapter VII provides a summary of the observations resulting from this study, and the implications for democratic transition. The conclusions drawn from the Eastern

European case studies, and their application in terms of the Middle East, demonstrate that a good civil society is indeed a significant catalyst of democratization, and this observation also applies to the Middle East. The thesis concludes by finding that, despite the differences in the conceptual interpretations of civil society, cross-regional studies of Eastern European and Middle Eastern civil societies contribute to a better understanding of the role civil society plays in democratization.

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## **II. CIVIL SOCIETY AND DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides the theoretical underpinnings of the concept of civil society by first reviewing the current literature and identifying important gaps. The chapter then goes on to establish the link between civil society and democratization and finds that, even if there is a great deal of debate over the significance of civil society in bringing about democratic change, the necessity of its presence and its favorable effects on democratization are largely undisputed. From these discussions, the chapter then provides the framework for comparing civil societies and their effects on democratization in Eastern Europe and the Middle East.

A major finding presented in this chapter is that in transitioning countries with a vibrant civil society, authoritarian reversal is much less likely than in those countries where civil society is either weak or non-existent. In addition, the debate surrounding the existence or non-existence of civil society in the Middle East and its effects for democratization is largely due to the lack of a definition of what constitutes a vibrant civil society. To remedy this shortcoming, the present study introduces the notions of good civil society, which promotes democratization, and bad civil society, and exhibits non-liberal, anti-democratic traits. This differentiation allows for the comparative application of the concept of civil society in Eastern European and Middle Eastern contexts.

The rest of this chapter will provide an overview of the debates about civil society, give a clear definition of the concept and list its constituting elements, establish a link between civil society and democratization, and briefly touch upon the current research on democratization and civil society. It concludes with the development of a set of criteria necessary to evaluate civil society.

## **B. DEBATES ABOUT CIVIL SOCIETY**

Today, there is no general agreement among scholars and theorists about the meaning of civil society, its constituting elements, or the social, economic, and political functions it is supposed to perform. What is more, civil society's role in bringing about democratization continues to be a hotly contested topic among academics, particularly after the events in the Arab world revitalized a discussion, which seemed to come to a rest in the wake of Eastern Europe's transition to democracy. This debate is largely fueled by the alternating views scholars and theorists hold about the concept of civil society; therefore, before introducing a working definition of civil society for this thesis, it is useful to provide a historic overview of the development of the concept and its alternating interpretations.

The emergence of the alternative conceptions of civil society can best be understood by examining two major traditions prevalent in literature related to Western civil society. The liberal (Lockean) idea of a self-regulating civil society, and of a limited government, first emerged in the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century, when the growth of market economies, coupled with the Age of Discovery, brought about a crisis in social order. People began to attribute social order not to some external entity, such as God or King, but to the workings of society itself. One of the early proponents of civil society was John Locke, who in his "Second Treatise" suggests that civil society—not yet separated from the State or political society—is the realm of political associations men created after having left the primordial and unregulated "state of nature" and having entered into a state of mutual contract and consent based on the rule of law and democratic participation.<sup>1</sup> As a consequence of the newly gained freedom, the security of person and property, and the ensuing social order, a state of civility emerged, which was maintained by the legal and judicial instruments of the state. It is important to note that according to the Lockean view, individuals submit to the authority of society, that is, they enter into a social contract with the community on the basis of freely given consent, and this consent can be withdrawn if their life, liberty, and property are not guaranteed.

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<sup>1</sup> Adam B. Seligman, "Civil Society as Idea and Ideal," in *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, eds. Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 15.

Advancing this concept, the thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment (i.e., Adam Smith, David Hume, and Adam Ferguson) argued that civil society—already having been separated from political society—emerged from the necessity to bond individuals together, based on the concept of reciprocity. According to this view, reciprocity attempts to reconcile private and individual interests with public and social good, through conscious commitments based on the moral sentiments of individuals.<sup>2</sup> According to Adam Smith, the rational pursuit of self-interest, that is, the recognition that individual interests can only be satisfied by cooperating with others, leads to social cohesion and a more sophisticated division of labor.<sup>3</sup>

Contrary to former views, civil society was no longer an artificial construct but a product of the progressive evolution of societies, characterized by moral and cultural accomplishments and, most importantly, by the subjection of the government to the rule of law.<sup>4</sup> This concept of social evolution, however, also raised the problem of the nature of relationships between developed and primitive communities existing next to each other. As an answer to this, Adam Ferguson claimed that civil society does not need to represent complete harmony; instead, civil societies have to clearly define themselves in relation to others, even if that involves competition and means of hostility.<sup>5</sup>

The liberal tradition of civil society was probably best articulated in the works of the eighteenth-century French thinkers, Montesquieu and Alexis de Tocqueville, who define civil society as a counterbalancing force of independent bodies limiting the absolutist state. For Montesquieu, these independent bodies were the wealthy towns and estates of medieval Europe, while for de Tocqueville, they were the local associations of citizens “acting together in the affairs of daily life.”<sup>6</sup> These intermediary associations do not exist merely outside the political structure, they also actively engage with politics by

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<sup>2</sup> Mark Jensen, *Civil Society in Liberal Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 30.

<sup>3</sup> Neera Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society: Explorations in Political Theory* (New Delhi; Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1995), 75.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> Keith Tester, *Civil Society* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992), 47.

<sup>6</sup> Michael Walzer, “The Idea of Civil Society: A Path to Social Reconstruction,” in *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader*, ed. Carolyn M Elliott (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 5.

educating citizens, facilitating communication and holding power-holders accountable. Thus, these social associations, while acting as a filter against absolutist power and providing protection for individuals against the abuse of the majority and the state, simultaneously promote the emergence of civic virtues and facilitate consensus building.<sup>7</sup>

In summary, according to the liberal theory, while civil societies have to defend themselves with all means against the despotic nature of more primitive communities, internally civil society is based on a system of rights protecting individuals from state oppression. This system of rights, however, can only be maintained if the state adheres to the common rules and principles established by the social contract.<sup>8</sup> If it does, civil society itself is able to temper passions, curb the un-moderated pursuit of private interest and politically educate its citizens, and thus, maintain the civility of society.<sup>9</sup>

Finally, a thorough account of the constituting elements of the libertarian version of civil society is given by the prominent American political philosopher Michael Walzer, according to whom liberal civil society should “include all social groups that are or can be understood as voluntary and non-coercive, thus excepting only the family, whose members are not volunteers, and the state, which, even if its legitimacy rests on the consent of its members, wields coercive power over them.”<sup>10</sup>

The other tradition, which is commonly referred to as the critical theory of civil society, nurtures considerable doubts about the self-regulating capability of civil society. According to the German philosopher Hegel, one of the early critical theorists, civil society is a historically produced sphere of ethical life based on the emerging needs of mankind for having access to welfare and civil law.<sup>11</sup> In his view, however, individuals are essentially egoistical and selfish, and thus, to prevent civil society from disintegrating, there is a need for the state to regulate society. The state must maintain

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<sup>7</sup> Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society*, 111.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>10</sup> Jensen, *Civil Society in Liberal Democracy*, 69.

<sup>11</sup> John Keane, *Civil Society: Old Images, New Visions* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998), 50.

civility of society through laws and organizations. For Hegel, it is the independent association and public opinion, both key components of civil society, which fulfill a political and ethical mediating role between the individual and the state.

Karl Marx, similar to Hegel, regarded civil society as a sphere of egoism, self-interest and conflict, having emerged out of the need to bring order to social relationships beyond that of small-scale societies. Contrary to Hegel, however, he found that it is not the state that can maintain the civility of civil society, but the contradictory interests threatening civility have to be reconciled from within civil society.<sup>12</sup> Within civil society the capitalist elite, however, have gained almost unlimited power; thus, in his view, civil society essentially becomes a synonym for class oppression. According to Marx, while the political sphere is gradually transformed through the introduction of rights, equality and justice, this transformation has left civil society largely untouched. Therefore, Marx's solution for civilizing civil society is to reunify state and society through a revolutionary transformation.<sup>13</sup>

For the Italian theorist Antonio Gramsci, the institutions of civil society, such as churches, clubs, universities, unions, and parties, serve the hegemonic purposes of the ruling elite by promoting the ideas necessary to maintain the status quo. In his view, the family is included in civil society because it is a vehicle of shaping the political attitudes of citizens, and thus, is central to the ideological socialization of the masses.<sup>14</sup> For Gramsci, civil society is the realm where the state in the form of a moral force regulates and controls the activities of individuals without having to resort to coercion.<sup>15</sup> This concept of civil society leads Gramsci to conclude that the Russian Revolution in 1917 could only succeed because the state was not supported by a civil society deeply entrenched in the minds of individuals.

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<sup>12</sup> Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society*, 134.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>14</sup> Simone Chambers, "A Critical Theory of Civil Society," in *Alternative Conceptions of Civil Society*, eds. Simone Chambers and Will Kymlicka (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 90–91.

<sup>15</sup> Tester, *Civil Society*, 141.

On the other hand, civil society in the Gramscian view is also the sphere of contestation, where subaltern classes can challenge the power of the dominant classes and the state. In order to successfully contest power, subaltern classes have to first hegemonize the social relations of civil society, which can only be achieved through a widespread social, political and cultural revolution.<sup>16</sup>

Contrary to liberal theorists, who see civil society as the realm of individual voluntarism, according to critical theorists such as Jean L. Cohen and Andrew Arato, civil society's defining element is communicative autonomy, which refers to "the freedom of actors in society to shape, criticize and reproduce essential norms, meanings, values and identities through communicative (as opposed to coercive) interaction."<sup>17</sup> The main difference between the two approaches is that, while liberals see state encroachment that limits individual choices as the main threat to civil society, according to critical theorists, power and money (that is the state and the economy) both have the capability to corrupt the ways in which we interact, and thus threaten the autonomy of civil society. Furthermore, power and money not only threaten civil society itself, but they can also distort the public sphere, which is the sphere where actors of civil society hold power-brokers accountable through institutions such as political parties, interest groups, welfare associations, social movements and religious bodies.<sup>18</sup> According to the famous German critical theorist Jürgen Habermas, a democratic public sphere cannot be safeguarded merely by instituting legal and constitutional provisions, but it is largely the responsibility of an energetic civil society to keep it intact.<sup>19</sup>

In summary, critical theorists argue that apart from the lack of a self-regulating capability, the unequal access to resources and opportunities can also have adverse

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<sup>16</sup> Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society*, 154.

<sup>17</sup> Chambers, "A Critical Theory of Civil Society," 93.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 97–98.

effects on civil society by breeding conflict among differing economic and political interests, and therefore a state capable of enforcing order is required to maintain the civil character of civil society.<sup>20</sup>

To conclude, the importance of the alternative concepts of civil society becomes clear by looking at the differing meanings that it assumes for “democratizers” from all around the world. While, for example, dissidents in Eastern Europe, in line with the liberal tradition, viewed civil society as a sphere of citizen activity beyond the direct control of the government, and thus capable of forming a counterweight to state power, reformers in the Middle East will need to introduce a concept of civil society that embraces elements of both traditions: civil society there needs to act as an intermediary zone against state encroachment, while at the same time, arm-in-arm with the state, it also has ensure that the civility of society is maintained by a common set of values and principles enshrined in the rule of law.<sup>21</sup>

### **C. DEFINING CIVIL SOCIETY**

Acclaimed political sociologist Larry Diamond defines civil society as “the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.”<sup>22</sup> An important aspect of this comprehensive definition is the reference to the autonomous, self-supporting nature of civil society, because, as will be argued in the thesis, a civil society that is intertwined with the state and dependent upon receiving funds from the regime cannot act as a catalyst for democratization. Diamond further adds to his interpretation that civil society “involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, preferences, and ideas, to exchange information, to achieve collective goals, to make demands on the state, to improve the

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<sup>20</sup> Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 8.

<sup>21</sup> Amy Hawthorne, “Is Civil Society the Answer?,” in *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East*, ed. Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace : Brookings Institution Press, distributor, 2005), 83.

<sup>22</sup> Larry Jay Diamond, *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), 221.

structure and functioning of the state, and to hold state officials accountable.”<sup>23</sup> These functions of civil society further the development of social capital, defined by American political scientist Robert D. Putnam, as “features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit,” increase citizen awareness and the civility of interactions between citizens, and improve democratic governance.<sup>24</sup> It is important to note that in his normative definition Diamond refers to the functions of a liberal and democratically inclined civil society, but this study will also introduce the notion of a civil society that lacks all these characteristics.

Another interesting contribution to defining the meaning of civil society is Adam B. Seligman’s *The Idea of Civil Society*.<sup>25</sup> The author tries to put the term civil society into a more sober perspective, at a time when the liberal Lockean concept of civil society espoused by Eastern European activists (and consequently adopted by Western social scientists) was considered as a panacea for all social problems. According to Seligman, the most important ingredient in reviving the concept of civil society is trust, which is expressed both in individual relationships and the creation of social institutions. This approach highlights the notion that social capital and civility are important building blocks of civil society.

In *The Dynamics of Democratization: Elites, Civil Society and the Transition Process*, Graeme J. Gill examines the role of movements within civil society during democratic transformations.<sup>26</sup> The author’s main aim is to give a descriptive account of the process of democratic transition focusing on political actors, the role of uncertainty and negotiations. Gill argues that civil society, with its actors demanding democratic change and offering the regime negotiating partners to engage with, plays a central role in the negotiations leading to transition. The volume offers some insight into the different

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<sup>23</sup> Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 221.

<sup>24</sup> Robert D. Putnam, “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” in *Democracy: a Reader*, ed. Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F Plattner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 105.

<sup>25</sup> Adam B. Seligman, *The Idea of Civil Society* (New York; Toronto; New York: Free Press; Maxwell Macmillan Canada; Maxwell Macmillan International, 1992).

<sup>26</sup> Graeme J. Gill, *The Dynamics of Democratization: Elites, Civil Society, and the Transition Process* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000).

types of negotiating postures opposition elites assume vis-à-vis non-democratic regimes, but it fails to establish a strong connection between democratization and civil society, instead explaining transition as a product of different factors, including economic crisis, regime disunity, political mobilization and international pressure.

Gill, makes an interesting claim worth further investigation, concluding that some degree of liberalization is necessary before civil society can thrive. This study will refer to this notion of liberalization as political opportunities open to civil society, which can appear in the form of more liberal laws and regulations introduced by the regime or a general slackening of state repression.<sup>27</sup>

In line with the liberal tradition, Saad Edin Ibrahim defines civil society as “[a]ll non-governmental and non-hereditary organizations that occupy the public domain between family and state, and are constituted by the free will of their members in order to promote a common cause or interest, or express a common point of view.”<sup>28</sup> According to Ibrahim, members of civil society “observe the values of due respect, compromise, tolerance, and the peaceful management of diversity and disagreement.”<sup>29</sup> This definition supports the notion of a self-regulating civil society, which is based on the values of civility, but fails to acknowledge that civil societies, especially in authoritarian regimes, are not always like this, which has important implications for its capability to further democratization.

Finally, examining the constituting elements of civil society, Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway argue that civil society, in its simplest form, refers to the “zone of voluntary associative life beyond family and clan affiliations but separate from the state and the market,” and is usually made up of nonprofit organizations, religious organizations, labor unions, business associations, interest and advocacy groups,

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<sup>27</sup> Doug McAdam, John D McCarthy, and Mayer Zald, *Comparative Perspectives on Social Movements: Political Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Cultural Framings* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10.

<sup>28</sup> Hamdy Abdel Rahman Hassan, “The State and Civil Society in Africa: A North African Perspective,” *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* 3, no. 2 (2009): 69.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

societies, clubs, and research institutions, as well as more informal political, social, and religious movements.<sup>30</sup> For the purposes of this study, this list of components will be used to evaluate the overall quality of civil society.

At this point, it has to be mentioned that notably missing from Carothers' and Ottaway's list are political parties. The reason for this is that political parties are usually seen as part of the political society, which has been treated separately from civil society since the works of the eighteenth century Scottish philosophers. The difference between civil society and political society can be best understood in the following way: while the self-organized associations of civil society usually attempt to influence power-holders, political society is comprised of parties trying to contest power in political institutions. Alfred Stepan calls political society the politicization of civil society organizations (CSOs) for the purpose of developing democratic pressure on the state and creating a democratic state apparatus.<sup>31</sup> This statement has important implications: while civil society might be able to influence political decision makers—because of its inability to aggregate differing views and interests in society as broadly as political parties are able to do—without a viable political society, civil society by itself is not capable of bringing about democratization.<sup>32</sup>

Graeme J. Gill even argues that without politically acting autonomous groups capable of functioning freely without state interference and restrictions, civil society cannot exist and, thus, even if associations pursuing members' interests in the public sphere exist within society, without political activism those groups only constitute civil society forces, but not civil society itself.<sup>33</sup> As in authoritarian environments, it is unlikely that civil society groups can act politically without state interference and

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<sup>30</sup> Thomas Carothers and Marina Ottaway, eds., *Uncharted Journey: Promoting Democracy in the Middle East* (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace: Brookings Institution Press, 2005), 82.

<sup>31</sup> Mehran Kamrava and Frank O. Mora, "Civil Society and Democratization in Comparative Perspective: Latin America and the Middle East," in *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader*, ed. Carolyn M Elliott (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 328.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Gill, *The Dynamics of Democratization*, 6.

restrictions; for the purposes of this study this concept, however, would unnecessarily hamstring attempts to investigate the substantial role civil society plays in bringing about democratization.

In addition, if we accept Stepan's claim that political society is the politicization of CSOs, it is easy to see that—due to the rootedness of political society in civil society—if CSOs do not themselves espouse core democratic values, such as tolerance and cooperation, political forces based on those CSOs will likely not become champions of democratization. In addition, even more than civil society, political society is held under the close scrutiny of the state, limiting and shaping it through laws and regulations, and trying to relieve it of its autonomy. Thus, while political and civil society both have to fight state interference, it is civil society in which the first seeds of democratization can develop. Therefore, this study limits itself to investigating certain criteria of civil society, based upon which prospects for democratization can be established.

#### **D. GOOD VERSUS BAD CIVIL SOCIETY**

Most scholars view an active and vibrant civil society as a precondition for democratization. Even so, the cases of the Weimar Republic and more recently the former Yugoslavia show that a vibrant and developed civil society can also nurture gravely anti-liberal and anti-democratic forces. Citizens in the civil society can retreat into insular groups with clearly defined barriers, where membership strengthens a sense of “us,” and outsiders are viewed as “them.” A bad civil society is based on limited civility, a civility which does not cross group boundaries.<sup>34</sup> The consequences of this limited civility are distrust and misunderstanding instead of trust and cooperation, the primary features of a good civil society.

How does bad civil society evolve? Discontent—often based on a sense of alienation, a general lack of political efficacy or meaningful participation in public life—makes people turn to groups that seemingly offer solutions for their

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<sup>34</sup> Chambers, “A Critical Theory of Civil Society,” 101.

frustrations (often by providing targets to blame).<sup>35</sup> These groups, if organized within rather than across group boundaries, often promote anti-democratic or anti-liberal values, which leads to the development of bad civil society.<sup>36</sup>

This leads us to the question of how much internal democracy or civility is needed in a group to regard it as part of good civil society. Cohen and Arato offer a minimal definition, according to which even a strictly hierarchical group like the Catholic Church, can be part of a democratized civil society if its members have agreed to the hierarchy of the group, the rest of the society and the state are convinced that the members have agreed to the current structure of the organization, and if the members are free to leave the group in case of disagreement.<sup>37</sup> In order for a group to be an integral part of good civil society, this minimal definition has to be expanded with the requirement to renounce violence and respect the views of other groups. Norton's definition of civility is based on this latter condition. According to Norton, "[c]ivility implies tolerance, the willingness of individuals to accept disparate political views, and social attitudes."<sup>38</sup> In addition, for the purposes of this study, civility will also include the notions of trust, reciprocity, and cooperation, because as Wanda Krause asserts, the presence and the combined strength of all of these values is essential for the emergence of a good civil society.<sup>39</sup>

The importance of these values becomes clear by considering their effects. In order to participate in collective institutions, such as labor unions, business associations and churches, individuals must be capable of establishing trust towards other members.<sup>40</sup> In fact, the lack of interpersonal trust is generally seen as one of the main factors allowing authoritarian regimes to survive. Reciprocity, including social interaction in the

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 103.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>38</sup> Carolyn M. Elliott, "Civil Society and Democracy: A Comparative Review Essay," in *Civil Society and Democracy: A Reader*, ed. Carolyn M Elliott (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2003), 17.

<sup>39</sup> Wanda Krause, *Women in Civil Society: The State, Islamism, and Networks in the UAE* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 24.

<sup>40</sup> James L. Gibson, "Social Networks, Civil Society, and the Prospects for Consolidating Russia's Democratic Transition," in *Social Capital and the Transition to Democracy*, eds. Gabriel Badescu and Eric M. Uslaner (London; New York: Routledge, 2003), 70.

form of sharing, giving and helping, “strengthens relations between members and organizations, and solidifies networks in which members can rely on one another to cooperate,” while “nondiscriminatory forms of cooperation are a key to establishing norms that support plurality.”<sup>41</sup> Finally, tolerance refers to the notion that people with diverse beliefs, traditions and practices can peacefully coexist and enjoy the same rights.<sup>42</sup> As Krause puts it:

When groups pursue interests and a version of the common good among competing positions, they contribute to the vibrancy of civil society. However, if intolerance toward competing beliefs and practices is articulated and practiced, then civility suffers.<sup>43</sup>

Diamond lists some useful conditions that set civil society organizations apart from other groups in society. These points can also be used to distinguish a good civil society which can act as a catalyst for democratization from a bad civil society which merely reinforces patterns of authoritarian behavior. First, civil society pursues public ends instead of private goals and thus is open to all citizens.<sup>44</sup> This is an important characteristic of a good civil society, which is inclusive, as opposed to a bad civil society, where membership is usually exclusionary. Second, civil society tries to influence decision-makers within the state in order to achieve certain policy changes, and in case the state remains unresponsive to societal demands, certain civil society organizations or movements might even try to remove power-holders, but as long as they do not commit violence and do not seek to assume power, they remain parts of the civil society.<sup>45</sup> Thus, while a democratic civil society essentially excludes groups committing violence, in a bad civil society disparate views are often met with hate and intolerance that can easily turn into violence.<sup>46</sup> Third, a good civil society advocates pluralism and diversity, which is in stark contrast to the anti-liberal and anti-democratic practices of bad civil society

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<sup>41</sup> Krause, *Women in Civil Society*, 24.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 24–25.

<sup>44</sup> Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 223.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Chambers, “A Critical Theory of Civil Society,” 105.

organizations.<sup>47</sup> Finally, civil society organizations usually do not represent the totality of interests of a given individual or community, which motivates citizens to join several organizations, associations or movements, promoting pluralism and diversity, and thus leading to a strengthening of cross-cutting cleavages within society.<sup>48</sup>

A bad civil society, on the contrary, is largely made up of insular groups where members usually do not belong to various groups. This point also highlights the need for a civil society sporting a dense network of associational life: the greater civil society is in terms of sheer numbers, the greater the likelihood that a wider range of views and interests are represented by its organizations, and the more likely it is that individuals embracing a complex set of interests will join several organizations, reinforcing cross-cutting patterns of potential social cleavages.<sup>49</sup>

The importance of cross-cutting cleavages in civil society is best understood by examining the societal effects of strong ties (based on family or clan relationships) versus weak ties (that can be found, for example, within voluntary associations), where the strength of a tie is determined by a “combination of the amount of time, the emotional intensity, the intimacy, and the reciprocal services which characterize the tie.”<sup>50</sup> A bad civil society is made up of strong but closed social networks that are usually internally homogeneous and cohesive, limiting interactions with those outside the network and thus, leading to the atomization of society.<sup>51</sup> On the other hand, weak ties are more likely to cross group boundaries, and thus promote social interaction. The importance of weak ties is also highlighted by Putnam, who claims “networks of civic engagement that cut across social cleavages nourish wider cooperation,” and thus promote the emergence of democratic governance.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 223.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 233.

<sup>50</sup> James L. Gibson, “Social Networks, Civil Society, and the Prospects for Consolidating Russia’s Democratic Transition,” 63.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 64.

In summary, when considering the role civil society plays in bringing about political change it is worth referring to Sheri Berman who argues that “[t]he growth of civil society should not be considered an undisputed good, but a politically neutral multiplier—neither inherently ‘good’ nor ‘bad,’ but dependent for its effects on the wider political environment and the values of those who control it.”<sup>53</sup> One of the main tasks of this thesis is to differentiate between a good civil society, which facilitates democratization, and a bad civil society, which strengthens non-liberal forces.

#### **E. ESTABLISHING THE LINK BETWEEN DEMOCRATIZATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

It is widely believed that civil society plays a crucial role in democratization as it promotes the emergence of a participatory civic culture, the dissemination of liberal values, the articulation of citizen’s interests, the recruitment of new political leaders and, thus, ultimately furthers the accountability of decision-makers and limits the power of the state.<sup>54</sup> Linz and Stepan list a free and lively civil society as one of the crucial requirements (next to the rule of law, a state apparatus, an institutionalized economic society and a relatively autonomous political society) as necessary for a democratic system to emerge and function.<sup>55</sup> Moreover, they argue that a lively and independent civil society with its capacity to generate political alternatives and monitor the state is a crucial criterion at all stages of the democratization process.<sup>56</sup> Diamond adds to these the notion that a civic community sporting the horizontal ties of trust and reciprocity is able to sever the vertical ties of authority and dependency at the local level, enabling a “transition from clientelism to citizenship,” and thus, deepening democracy.<sup>57</sup> Finally, as Nick Troiano puts it:

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<sup>53</sup> Sheri Berman, “Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society,” *Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 2 (2003): 266.

<sup>54</sup> Natalia Letki, “Social Capital and Civil Society,” in *Democratization*, ed. Christian W Haerpfer et al. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 159.

<sup>55</sup> Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, “Toward Consolidated Democracies,” in *Debates on Democratization*, eds. Larry Jay Diamond, Marc F. Plattner, and Philip J. Costopoulos (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>57</sup> Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 244.

[Civil society] is supposed to moderate attitudes, promote social interaction, facilitate trust, and increase solidarity and public spiritedness. Through a dense network of relationships and associations, civil society creates the conditions for social integration, public awareness and action, and democratic stability.<sup>58</sup>

One of the first studies about the links between democratization and civil society was conducted by the Frenchman Alexis de Tocqueville when he visited the United States in the 1830s. In his work *Democracy in America* de Tocqueville concluded that one of the main conditions for the functioning of democracy in the United States is its citizens' propensity for civic associations.<sup>59</sup> Building on de Tocqueville's findings, American scholars have suggested that the quality of public life and the performance of social and political institutions are heavily dependent on the norms and networks of civic engagement.<sup>60</sup> The reason for this is elaborated by Putnam, who argues that civic engagement fosters the creation of social capital.<sup>61</sup> The more social capital a community possesses, the more its members are able to communicate and collaborate effectively with each other in order to attain common goals, which on the one hand promotes civil solidarity and thus improves the quality of public life, and on the other hand increases the performance of social and political institutions based on the democratic values of trust, cooperation and solidarity.<sup>62</sup>

Furthermore, with regard to the current study, the importance of social capital is underlined by the fact that in authoritarian regimes, where the formal institutions of civil society are restricted or forbidden, citizens form informal networks and organizations,<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Nick Troiano, "Civil Society & Democratization in Egypt," *History of the Middle East*, 2011. <http://www.nicktroiaino.com/blog/2011/8/22/civil-society-democratization-in-egypt.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America: and Two essays on America* (London: Penguin, 2003), 596.

<sup>60</sup> Putnam, "Bowling Alone," 104.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

<sup>63</sup> See for example the emergence of Palestinian welfare organizations in the occupied territories of Gaza and the West Bank in the 1980s. In Glenn E Robinson, *Building a Palestinian State: The Incomplete Revolution* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

based on the basic components of social capital, such as trust and cooperation, in order to gather information, disseminate democratic ideals and engage in social activism.<sup>64</sup>

At this point it is important to note that despite de Tocqueville's claims that associations have to sport a sizeable membership to have any power in democracies, in terms of social capital bigger is not always better.<sup>65</sup> Only those classic secondary associations, in which members actively engage with each other on a regular basis, can effectively foster social capital.<sup>66</sup> For example, Putnam argues that mass-membership organizations, such as environmental and feminist groups, do not further social capital, because its members—though they are attached to common symbols, common leaders or common ideals—aside from paying membership fees or reading newsletters often do not communicate or cooperate with each other.<sup>67</sup> Thus, these organizations, despite having grown in size and numbers in the past decades, do not necessarily contribute to the creation of a vibrant civil society.

Having learned about the importance of civic engagement necessarily leads to the question of how does a participatory civil society exert influence within a democratic political system. According to Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl “[m]odern political democracy is a system of governance in which rulers are held accountable for their actions in the public realm by citizens, acting indirectly through the competition and cooperation of their elected representatives.”<sup>68</sup> This definition, however, reduces democracies to the mere presence of elections, where in the period between elections citizens have no influence whatsoever on policy-makers. Most authoritarian regimes today hold some sort of elections at the local or even national level. Even if these elections would be considered largely free and fair, those regimes would not pass for democracies. Therefore, to qualify their definition, Schmitter and Karl add that, in

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<sup>64</sup> Letki, “Social Capital and Civil Society,” 161.

<sup>65</sup> Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 597.

<sup>66</sup> Putnam, “Bowling Alone,” 109.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> Philippe C. Schmitter and Terry Lynn Karl, “What Democracy Is ... and Is Not,” in *Democracy: a Reader*, ed. Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F Plattner (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 4.

democracies in the period between elections, citizens have certain means at their disposal to try to influence public policy; these means are in essence the institutions of civil society, such as interest associations, social movements or advocacy groups.<sup>69</sup> This claim naturally begs the question, which is also going to be addressed by this study, whether citizens in authoritarian regimes, where elections are either non-existent or are less than free and fair, can exert influence on public policies through the institutions of civil society.

Further research in this area is also warranted by studies which claim the existence of a positive relation between civic engagement and democratization. Natalia Letki, for example, proposes that participation in the voluntary associations of civil society has positive effects for democratization as it socializes “individuals into cooperative behavior,” provides them “with a number of skills necessary to effectively shape politics at the local and national level” and expands “their formal and informal networks, which they may use for other, political or social, purposes.”<sup>70</sup>

Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers provide an even more elaborate assessment of the democracy-enhancing functions of voluntary associations.<sup>71</sup> They claim that associations can provide policy-makers with information on the preferences of the membership, what impact proposed legislation is going to have or how current laws are implemented and accepted by the members.<sup>72</sup> This helps decision-makers to get a better understanding of popular demands and thus to address those demands and grievances by more circumspect laws and regulations. On the other hand, members can use the information channels provided by associations to present their demands effectively to political elites, thus enhancing those channels of interaction between state and society that are characteristic of democracies. Associations also help to equalize representation, that is, through their capacity to pool resources they can enable members with fewer economic opportunities

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>70</sup> Letki, “Social Capital and Civil Society,” 162.

<sup>71</sup> Joshua Cohen and Joel Rogers, “Secondary Associations and Democratic Governance,” in *Associations and Democracy*, ed. Erik Olin Wright (London; New York: Verso, 1995), 42.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

to present their views and demands to a wider audience and to policy-makers.<sup>73</sup> This enables disadvantaged parts of the population to take part in the public discourse in democracies. Furthermore, associations provide a public space for citizens' education, where members embrace democratic values like tolerance and cooperation.<sup>74</sup> It is in these public spaces where members espouse the underlying principles of civility, the capability to build trust and to accept disparate views. Finally, associations provide an alternative form of social governance, that is, building on the bonds of trust and cooperation established among its membership, as well as the established channels of communication, they can help to formulate and execute public policies, and thus, reduce transaction costs for states.<sup>75</sup> Put another way:

At its best, civil society provides an intermediate layer of governance between the individual and the state that is capable of resolving conflicts and controlling the behavior of members without public coercion. Rather than overloading decision makers with increased demands and making the system ungovernable, a viable civil society can mitigate conflicts and improve the quality of citizenship—without relying exclusively on the privatism of the marketplace.<sup>76</sup>

This allows the state to withdraw from certain areas of public life, which strengthens the self-regulatory powers of society by furthering the autonomy of civil society. Again, it has to be emphasized that civil society in general and the various forms of voluntary associations in particular can only fulfill their democracy enhancing role if they themselves embrace values such as trust, tolerance, reciprocity and cooperation.

This study would not be complete if it did not take into account those who question the role civil society plays in furthering democratization. Among the critical theories, modern transitology is especially salient, having coined the term “democracy without democrats,” to allude to the notion that “third wave” countries do not need to have a society that strongly embraces democratic values, or have a high level of political participation, to make the transition from an authoritarian regime to a more democratic

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>76</sup> Schmitter and Karl, “What Democracy Is ... and Is Not,” 8.

system.<sup>77</sup> Instead, according to its tenets, what is needed are reasonable and artful politicians who might not qualify as “genuine” democrats, but can support those democratic forces within society that would otherwise be too weak to act as catalysts of democratization on their own.<sup>78</sup> While this study acknowledges the importance of political entrepreneurs in promoting democratization (as has been referred to in highlighting the role political society plays), even modern transitologists agree that countries lacking a civil society that espouses democratic values and holds power-holders accountable are more likely to experience a reversal in the achievements of democratization and therefore might fall into the category of quasi-democracies.<sup>79</sup> Thus, while there is a reasonable debate among theorists over the significance of the role civil society plays in democratization, the necessity of its presence in the process is largely undoubted.

#### **F. THE COMPONENTS OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

This study focuses on the institutional and non-institutional components of modern civil society in the Middle East and in Eastern Europe. Such components include advocacy and service providing non-governmental organizations, professional syndicates, business associations, labor unions, the church and social movements. In this section, a short overview of the different components of civil society is provided.

One critical component of civil society is the groups that organize individuals. These groups and organizations have several names but, in this thesis, will be known as non-governmental organizations (NGOs). According to a definition provided by Mary Kaldor, NGOs are institutional and generally professional; they include voluntary associations, charities, foundations or professional societies, and they are usually formally registered. Organizations can be defined as “purposeful, role-bound social

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<sup>77</sup> Ghia Nodia, “How Different Are Postcommunist Transitions?,” in *Democracy after Communism*, ed. Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F Plattner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 10.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

units.” NGOs are organizations which are voluntary, in contrast to compulsory organizations like the state or some traditional, religious organizations, and they do not make profits like corporations.<sup>80</sup>

NGOs can be divided into two groups. Service provision NGOs focus primarily on offering public services the state is unwilling or unable to provide, like health care, education or legal services. Advocacy NGOs usually conduct activities, such as lobbying or public mobilization and campaigning around particular issues, like human rights or environmental protection.

Another component of civil society is formed by professional syndicates, which are well established and highly politicized organizations. They serve their “members’ interests and provide services that fulfill their needs as well as help in drafting of laws that affect their professions.”<sup>81</sup> Several professions pool into syndicates, such as judges, lawyers, physicians, journalists, engineers or professors. Similarly, business associations organize to support businesses and economic growth, and to further the interests of their membership. Members are usually recruited from both the private and the public sectors, and as such, these associations usually have close ties to state officials.<sup>82</sup> Finally, labor unions form to serve their members’ interests in terms of wages and working conditions. They usually boast high membership levels and are tightly controlled by the state.<sup>83</sup>

Religious groups in the Middle East are not dealt with separately because most of them are well organized and engage in service delivery and thus are treated as Islamic service providing NGOs. The church in Eastern Europe refers to the Catholic Church in Poland and the Orthodox Church in Russia.

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<sup>80</sup> Mary Kaldor, *Global Civil Society: An Answer to War* (Cambridge, UK; Malden, MA: Polity Press ; Distributed in the USA by Blackwell Pub., 2003), 86.

<sup>81</sup> Mahi Khallaf, *Civil Society in Egypt: A Literature Review* (Foundation for the Future, 2010), 6.

<sup>82</sup> Maha M Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed: The Politics of NGOs in Egypt* (London; New York: Tauris Academic, 2004), 8.

<sup>83</sup> Khallaf, *Civil Society in Egypt*, 6.

Finally, social movements are an important phenomenon in civil society building. McAdam et al. define a social movement as “a loose collectivity acting with some degree of organization, temporal continuity, and reliance on non-institutional forms of action to promote or resist change in the group, society, or world order of which it is part.”<sup>84</sup> Cohen and Arato argue that social movements are key ingredients of a vigorous civil society and are an important manifestation of civic participation in the public sphere.<sup>85</sup> This is so because, while creating new associations and addressing new publics, social movements also increase the egalitarian character of existing institutions and strengthen public discussion within civil society.<sup>86</sup> Thus, social movements, such as the labor movement, the civil rights movement, and the feminist movement, aim to democratize and de-traditionalize civil society itself.<sup>87</sup>

The advantage of social movements is that they are able to bypass existing political channels in order to exert influence; however, in doing so, they often lack internal democracy, and to attain their goals, the members often engage in civil disobedience, such as strikes, sit-ins, boycotts, or mass demonstrations.<sup>88</sup>

Finally, civil disobedience can be an important link between civil society and democratic change. Civil disobedience can be understood as “vigorous acts of deliberate law breaking or extroverted acts of disputed legality, whose stated aim is to bring before a public either the alleged illegitimacy or ethical or political indefensibility of certain government laws or corporate or state policies.”<sup>89</sup> This, coupled with its self-limiting nature, implies that civil disobedience cannot be understood as being a sign of incivility.

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<sup>84</sup> Doug McAdam and David A Snow, *Readings on Social Movements: Origins, Dynamics and Outcomes* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

<sup>85</sup> Jean L Cohen and Andrew Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 19.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*, 548.

<sup>87</sup> Jensen, *Civil Society in Liberal Democracy*, 55.

<sup>88</sup> Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 566.

<sup>89</sup> Keane, *Civil Society*, 136.

Furthermore, by expanding the range and forms of public participation, and leading to additional rights, civil disobedience can act as a catalyst of democratization.<sup>90</sup>

## **G. LITERATURE ON DEMOCRATIZATION AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN EASTERN EUROPE AND THE MIDDLE EAST**

The following section provides an overview of the existing literature on democratization and civil society in Eastern Europe and the Middle East. While this list by no means presents a comprehensive account of the studies available in the underlying area of research, it nevertheless offers insight into strengths and possible shortcomings in the existing literature.

Beginning with the literature on democratic transitions, Larry Diamond, in *Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation*, examines whether new democracies are likely to stabilize what the prospects of democratic reversal are, and whether a “fourth wave” of democratization might be impending.<sup>91</sup> In light of the recent developments in the Arab world, the latter question could not be more acute. Contributing to the study of democratic transition, Diamond classifies the different political systems as more or less democratic based on the actions of the regime, the characteristics of elections, civil liberties, and the state of political culture. The author asserts that a multitude of factors—like new parties, a vibrant civil society, a functioning legislature and the rule of law—are necessary for democracies to take root, but the process is by no means a fixed sequence, nor has it a fixed timetable. With regard to the importance of civil society in the process of democratization, this inconclusiveness leads to the famous question about what comes first, the chicken or the egg? Nevertheless, besides stating the importance of a liberal-pluralist past, Diamond concludes that the more vibrant and autonomous a civil society is, the more likely democracy will emerge.

The topic of democratization and civil society in Eastern Europe is covered by a large and extensive body of literature. In *Post-Communist Politics: Democratic Prospects in Russia and Eastern Europe*, Michael McFaul offers an overview of the complexities of

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<sup>90</sup> Cohen and Arato, *Civil Society and Political Theory*, 567.

<sup>91</sup> Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 22.

the collapse of the communist rule in the region and the problems posed by the process of democratization.<sup>92</sup> Concerned primarily with a descriptive account of historical events in Hungary, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Russia, the author identifies the time of elections as a key variable for a negotiated, peaceful transition toward democracy. The author argues that the sooner elections are held after the fall of the old regime, the more incentives political parties can offer to their respective constituencies, and the more influence the political parties have in shaping political developments during the transitional period. Unfortunately, the role social forces played in these processes of transformation receive only minor attention.

Much like the uprisings in the Arab world in 2010–2011, the sudden fall of Communism in Eastern Europe took most Western observers by complete surprise. The unexpectedness of the events naturally begs the question whether scholars in the West did overlook some essential factors that brought down most of the decades old totalitarian regimes. Civil society proffers itself as one of those underestimated factors. The volume *The Reemergence of Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union*, edited by Zbigniew Rau, shows the relevance civil society played in bringing about the radical changes in the region.<sup>93</sup> While Rau uses civil society in a liberal, Lockean sense by claiming that it “is a voluntary association of individuals and their associations participating in political life and forming a moral community” incompatible with state collectivism, the other authors have a fairly different concept of the term—ranging from equating civil society with property rights and the rule of law to claims that instead of being a synonym for capitalist polyarchy, civil society should move in the direction of a more open democracy.<sup>94</sup> This results in different, sometimes even contradicting explanations about the reemergence of civil society in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

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<sup>92</sup> Michael McFaul, *Post-Communist Politics: Democratic Prospects in Russia and Eastern Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1993).

<sup>93</sup> Zbigniew Rau, *The Reemergence of Civil Society in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1991).

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 138.

The four case studies presented in the book offer various reasons for the appearance of a vibrant civil society, including the power of a collective memory, the role intellectuals play and the importance of nationalistic sentiments in “rallying people around the flag,” the latter claimed to be a necessary, albeit insufficient, precondition for the development of a liberal civil society, although the causal direction in this case is far from clear.

The Arab Spring bears some important similarities to the variance of successful democratic transition in Eastern Europe. A good source to start research on the uprisings in North Africa and the Middle East in 2010 and 2011 is *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know*, written by historian James L. Galvin.<sup>95</sup> In a question-and-answer format, the book explores all aspects of the revolutionary protests in the Arab world, including a search for its causes, the motivations of the participants and the role of the youth, the military and religious groups. The author does not take a big risk by concluding that the popular protests did not have a single cause and by claiming that it remains to be seen whether the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt really will mean the end of autocracy. Taking a deeper look into the various independent variables causing the protests and their correlation might allow for making some educated guesses about the prospects of democratization in the affected Arab countries.

*Democratization and Development: New Political Strategies for the Middle East*, edited by Dietrich Jung, tries to offer an alternative to the dominant viewpoint held by political theorists, including Samuel Huntington, that Islam is inherently incompatible with democracy.<sup>96</sup> By claiming that contrary to widely held beliefs the Arab region is not politically homogeneous, Jung sees chances for democratization in the Middle East. In *Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts*, Oliver Schlumberger, on the other hand, argues that Western-oriented theories of democracy are not applicable to the region and efforts should be made to support an

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<sup>95</sup> James L. Galvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

<sup>96</sup> Dietrich Jung, *Democratization and Development: New Political Strategies for the Middle East*, (Gordonsville, VA: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

adequate internal agency and to foster elites.<sup>97</sup> In another article, Thomas Scheffler claims that the assumption that homogeneous states are more prone to democracy is not applicable to the Arab world, because pan-Arab movements are based on what he calls “monoethnicity.” According to Scheffler, transnationalism, like anti-globalization movements, might foster democratic initiatives. In his concluding remarks Jung argues that democratization is a process wrought with conflict and, in the short term, this may lead to instability in the Middle East.<sup>98</sup>

Probably the most comprehensive work on the question of civil society in the region is the volume *Civil Society in the Middle East*, edited by Augustus Richard Norton, which predates the Arab Spring.<sup>99</sup> The views expressed by the authors assert that even with limited rights, social organizations in many countries of the Arab world have reached a critical mass, and possess the necessary space to foster the development of a civil society through interactions with each other and the state. Norton assumes that a vital and autonomous civil society is a necessary (albeit insufficient) condition of democracy. The two main issues addressed by the volume are whether the notion of civil society can be applied to the Middle East and whether Islamists should be considered a part of it. Eva Bellin supports the use of the term civil society as a tool of analysis, because Arab intellectuals and activists have themselves opted to do so. In another of her articles, Bellin argues that “[b]y retaining the term civil society we will combat the tendency toward Middle East exceptionalism and invite comparative, cross-regional analysis of this dynamic process, “a notion, which supports the conduct of a comparative-study between civil societies in the Middle East and Eastern Europe.<sup>100</sup> On the integration of Islamists, Saad Eddin Ibrahim asserts that in Islam there is nothing inherently contradictory to democracy and civil society and as long as religious-based parties and associations adhere to the norms of civility and pluralism they should be considered part of civil society. Ahmad Moussalli argues that radical and violent

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, 181.

<sup>99</sup> Augustus R. Norton, *Civil Society in the Middle East* (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1995).

<sup>100</sup> Eva Bellin, “Civil Society: Effective Tool of Analysis for Middle East Politics?” *Political Science and Politics* 27, no. 3 (1994), 510.

fundamentalism is largely a result of state action. Nevertheless, the fairly optimistic tone expressed throughout the volume about the prospects of the development of civil society in the Middle East is put in perspective by Mustapha al-Sayyid who concludes that, besides the state, society itself also has demonstrated a great deal of intolerance for pluralism and liberal values, which casts doubts on its civil character.

Contrary to the views expressed in the Norton volume, in *Democracy in the Balance: Culture and Society in the Middle East*, Mehran Kamrava argues that Middle Eastern culture and society, and especially Islam, hinder the development of democracy in the region.<sup>101</sup> Kamrava finds that Islam is not prone to change in the future, and the lack of democratically inclined intellectuals and properly formed social classes inhibits the development of a liberal civil society. The author distinguishes between two types of democracies: quasi democracies are a result of negotiations among political elites, while viable democracies are based on civil societies with a democratic political culture. Kamrava claims that civil society must be in place before proper democratization can unfold. He rejects the political crafting theory of Giuseppe Di Palma, which asserts that initiatives for transition by authoritarian forces might result in a democratic outcome, on the grounds that while the outcome of these bargaining processes may be democratic, they might lack the social and cultural components inherent in democracy.<sup>102</sup> The major shortcoming of the book, however, is the fact that Kamrava never gives a clear definition of civil society; instead he simply enumerates certain characteristics of it, including tolerance, homogenous national culture and democratically inclined individuals.

Despite the growing interest for civil society in the Arab world, the applicability of the term to the Middle East—mostly because of the Western connotations it comes with—continues to be a hotly contested topic in academic circles.<sup>103</sup> On the one hand, there are those like Saad Eddin Ibrahim and John L. Esposito, who note that civil society

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<sup>101</sup> Mehran Kamrava, *Democracy in the Balance: Culture and Society in the Middle East* (New York, NY: Chatham House Publishers / Seven Bridges Press, 1998).

<sup>102</sup> Mehran Kamrava, *Democracy in the Balance: Culture and Society in the Middle East* (New York, NY: Chatham House Publishers / Seven Bridges Press, 1998), 13.

<sup>103</sup> Berna Turam, "The Politics of Engagement Between Islam and the Secular State: Ambivalences of 'Civil Society,'" *The British Journal of Sociology* 55, no. 2 (2004): 263.

existed in the Middle East long before the term was even developed in the West and that Islamic history provides ample evidence of non-state actors, institutions and organizations serving as intermediaries between state and society.<sup>104</sup> On the other hand, Keane observes that numerous Islamic scholars reject the Western notion that civil society has to be based on secularism, arguing that the continuous reference to secularism only helps to keep authoritarian regimes in power.<sup>105</sup>

For the sake of conducting a comparative study, and to reject notions of Arab exceptionalism, the study forgoes conclusions about the applicability of the term civil society to the Middle East, and instead introduces the ideas of good (meaning liberal) and bad (meaning non-liberal) civil societies. In addition, the study will include within the concept of good civil society all those Islamic associations and movements that renounce violence.

Furthermore, the thesis does not wish to address the question of whether Islam is compatible with democracy, as there is significant literature addressing this question with a host of theorists arguing for (Ibrahim, 1998; Filali-Ansary, 1999; Pool, 1994) and against (Gellner, 1983; Kamrava, 1998; Huntington, 1991) the notion of a democratic Islam. At this point, it is sufficient to say that there is nothing inherently anti-democratic in Islam. Quite to the contrary, several crucial components of democracy are also present in the Qur'an and the teachings of the Prophet Muhammad, such as the freedom of expression, freedom of conscience and the sanctity of life and property.<sup>106</sup>

A large part of the debate surrounding the role of civil society in bringing about democratization derives from the confusion about alternative conceptions of civil society, as well as the lack of clear definitions and components of the term. Norton asserts that a vital civil society is a necessary condition of democracy, but he does not further elaborate what constitutes vitality. One of the challenges for this thesis will be to suggest a more

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<sup>104</sup> John L. Esposito, "Islam and Civil Society," in *Modernizing Islam: Religion in the Public Sphere in the Middle East and Europe*, ed. John L Esposito and François Burgat (New Brunswick, NJ : Rutgers University Press, 2003), 70.

<sup>105</sup> Keane, *Civil Society*, 27.

<sup>106</sup> Anwar Ibrahim, "Universal Values and Muslim Democracy," in *Democracy: a Reader*, ed. Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F Plattner (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009), 371.

refined approach in using the different concepts of civil society, as well as to define a clear set of conditions that are necessary to qualify a civil society as being able to promote democratization.

## **H. EVALUATING CIVIL SOCIETY**

As presented, a civil society embracing the norms of civility has several democracy enhancing aspects. The present study, however, does not attempt to examine whether those democracy enhancing aspects are sufficient to bring about democratic transformation. Referring to Linz and Stepan's list of necessary requirements, civil society, even if it embraces core democratic values, is only one of several critical components that need to be in place if a viable democratic change is to be achieved.<sup>107</sup> What is more important for the purpose of this thesis is the question whether a vibrant civil society, called good civil society in this study, is indeed necessary for democratic change to take root or put it in another way: can a viable democratic system emerge in spite of a civil society exhibiting non-liberal, anti-democratic traits?

In order to answer this question a set of criteria has to be introduced capable of measuring the "goodness" of civil society and its institutions. To begin with, in assessing the quality of civil society organizations three indicators proposed by Wanda Krause in her study *Women in Civil Society: The State, Islamism, and Networks in the UAE* will be used: participation, empowerment and civility.<sup>108</sup>

The level of participation refers not just to voter turnout at board or leadership elections in CSOs, but also to active collaboration among members to achieve common goals. It is said to occur "when people organize around specific interests, negotiate, and collaborate to reach particular ends."<sup>109</sup> At this point it has to be noted that high membership numbers in CSOs do not necessarily imply a high level of participation, as membership usually also includes passive individuals whose main contribution is limited to paying membership fees, a phenomena which, according to Putnam, does not further

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<sup>107</sup> Linz and Stepan, "Toward Consolidated Democracies," 6.

<sup>108</sup> Krause, *Women in Civil Society*, 22–3.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

the creation of trust and cooperation among individuals.<sup>110</sup> Empowerment implies the extent to which civil society organizations, as a consequence of the active participation and collaboration of its members, are capable to influence power-holders and have an effect on the institutional environment.<sup>111</sup> Civility, which also encompasses the beneficial aspects of social capital, includes the interrelated values of trust, reciprocity, cooperation, and tolerance.

In addition to the aforementioned indicators, in analyzing civil society the level of autonomy of CSOs will be investigated. The importance of autonomy is given by the fact that civil society is only able to fully assume its role as a mediating sphere between state and individual if it is not controlled or co-opted by external forces, be it by the state or by religious authorities. Autonomy, however, does not mean that CSOs can do whatever they want; CSOs have to function within the legal limits of political action, which essentially excludes activities based on violence.

Furthermore, as presented, while social atomization and strong ties are usually signs of a bad civil society, the presence of cross-cutting cleavages avoids the emergence of insular groups and furthers the development of a good civil society and thus constitutes another important criterion in this study.

Finally, as Diamond notes, countries with a liberal-pluralist past and previous civic traditions that can be recovered are more likely to develop a democratic civil society than those countries which lack a similar past or where civic traditions were weak.<sup>112</sup> Moreover, periods of expanded political opportunities may also lead to the emergence of so-called political opportunity “holdovers,” which provide civil society with memories of a more liberal environment of collective mobilization during periods of heightened

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<sup>110</sup> Putnam, “Bowling Alone,” 109.

<sup>111</sup> Krause, *Women in Civil Society*, 22.

<sup>112</sup> Diamond, *Developing Democracy*, 252.

repression.<sup>113</sup> These “holdovers” can promote the reconstitution of civil society in the wake of political liberalization, and thus it is important to include their examination in the present study.

In summary, as presented, a good civil society has many democracy enhancing functions, but probably the function most feared by authoritarian regimes is its capacity to produce a critical rational discourse capable of holding power-holders accountable. State accountability, however, is a function of the practices of the citizens inhabiting civil society. Only a self-conscious, vibrant and politically active civil society has the capability to impose limits on state power, whereas a passive, largely co-opted civil society is likely to encounter an unresponsive state.<sup>114</sup> Furthermore, a civil society that is itself not democratic, and that lacks the critical conditions of civility, is not likely to act as a catalyst for democratization. Therefore, the main aim of this study is to examine whether in the countries selected civil society is able to fulfill the “messianic” role Diamond, Stepan, Linz, and other proponents of the democratic theory attribute to it.

## **I. CONCLUSIONS**

In summary, this chapter asserts that a vigorous civil society is a necessary, albeit insufficient condition for democratic change. It also finds that the voluntary associations of civil society have favorable effects on democratization, such as instilling democratic values in people and holding power-holders accountable. Thus, it is argued that the presence of a vibrant civil society significantly decreases the likelihood of an authoritarian reversal.

In addition, the chapter claims that in the case of civil society quantity does not equal quality. A civil society with numerous organizations, if it is bereft of its autonomy and exhibits non-liberal values, can reinforce authoritarian patterns. Thus, to distinguish between a vibrant civil society that can act as a catalyst of democratization and a weak

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<sup>113</sup> Paul D Almeida, “Opportunity Organizations and Threat-Induced Contentment: Protest Waves in Authoritarian Settings,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 2 (2003): 350.

<sup>114</sup> Chandhoke, *State and Civil Society*, 10.

civil society that blocks democratic change, the chapter introduces the notions of good and bad civil society. Table 1 presents the differences between the two:

<b>Good civil society</b>	<b>Bad civil society</b>
Is inclusive, open to all; exhibits a dense network of associational life; weak ties promote cross-cutting cleavages	Is exclusionary; has a few insular groups exhibiting strong ties; social atomization
Has CSOs that advocate values such as trust, reciprocity, cooperation and tolerance; reject violence	Has CSOs that display non-liberal and anti-democratic attitudes; violence as an expression of hate and intolerance
Has CSOs whose members actively participate in board elections and collaborate to achieve common goals	Displays nominal participation in CSOs, e.g., to paying membership fees; low voter turnouts in board elections
Has empowered CSOs capable to achieve tangible political results	Has collective action that does not influence decision-makers
Enjoys autonomy from state and/or religious authorities	Has CSOs that are largely co-opted and/or are heavily dependent on state funding
Spurs memories of a liberal-pluralist past furthering the emergence of good civil society	Exhibits absence of liberal-pluralist traditions reinforcing illiberal patterns of behavior

Table 1. Comparison of Types of Civil Society and Their Criteria.

The following chapters investigate case studies of civil societies in Eastern Europe and the Middle East, based upon which the central hypotheses regarding civil society’s role in democratic transition can be tested. Civil societies will be examined based on the criteria established, namely participation, empowerment, civility, autonomy, cross-cutting cleavages and political opportunity “holdovers.”

Eastern Europe’s transition to democracy will include studies on Poland and Russia. While Poland made a successful transformation into a liberal democracy, transformation in Russia is lacking in several aspects, and its political system today is best described as semi-authoritarian in nature. Despite sporting similar Soviet-type regimes, political transformation in the two countries took diverging paths, which is attributed to differences in the quality of civil society.

The Middle East's transition to democracy will include studies of Tunisia and Egypt, two countries where the uprisings of the Arab Spring successfully deposed long-standing rulers. While Tunisian civil society was strongly suppressed, even in Middle Eastern terms, civil society in Egypt—compared to other nations in the region—enjoyed a long period of relatively unfettered development, best represented by its highly institutionalized nature. Despite the more favorable conditions of civil society development, Egypt's path to democratization is riddled with stumbling blocks and detours, while political transformation in Tunisia seems to be relatively smooth in comparison. Differences in the nature of both civil societies shed light on the reasons for the divergence of the two paths.

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### **III. POLAND: CIVIL SOCIETY'S ROAD TO VICTORY**

#### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Poland stepped on the final path of democratization in the summer of 1989 when Solidarity gained an overwhelming victory in the first (semi-) democratic elections held in a country of the Eastern Bloc. The results surprised many observers on both sides of the Iron Curtain as Poland, after the experience of martial law in the early 1980s, and despite the slow political liberalization in the second half of the 1980s, was still widely regarded as one of the more repressive states in Eastern Europe. An analysis of Polish civil society, however, proves that Solidarity's strong showing in the elections was no accident as it was the culmination of a process that began already in the second half of the 1970s. Despite its head start, Poland was soon overtaken by other transitioning countries in the Eastern Bloc; the presence of a vibrant, good civil society made sure that in the country where Solidarity saw its birth the process of democratization was irreversible.

Drawing from the criteria established in Chapter II (see Table 1), Poland's civil society will be evaluated accordingly. This chapter argues that civil society in Poland was not able to achieve lasting success in its struggle against the regime in the 1950s, 1960s, and early 1970s, because it did not embrace the notion of cooperation. This changed in the second half of the 1970s, when a triangle of cooperation emerged between the workers, the intelligentsia and the Catholic Church that was able to challenge the state and ultimately led to the creation of the Solidarity movement. While the state tried to suppress the burgeoning civil society by introducing martial law, by that time Polish civil society had already developed strong political opportunity "holdovers" that allowed it to survive the ensuing period of harsh repression. When, as a result of changes in the political opportunity structure the regime was forced to slacken repression, it was only a matter of time until civil society regained its former strength. The chapter concludes by arguing that Polish civil society displayed all characteristics of a good civil society, which allowed Poland to firmly set out on the path towards becoming a true democracy.

## B. A DEFUNCT CIVIL SOCIETY

State-socialist systems, especially under the early period of Stalinism, created a dense network of state-controlled organizations and movements with mandatory memberships. These organizations were created in order to colonize public space and hinder the emergence of autonomous voluntary associations.<sup>115</sup> During the process of de-Stalinization in the late 1950s some of these organizations acquired a modicum of autonomy which they used to accumulate considerable resources and provide their members with wide ranging benefits.<sup>116</sup> Some of them ventured even so far as to occasionally defy state-policies while representing their corporate interests. After having gained a small share of the public space, however, these organizations soon encountered the limits of their autonomous existence when the state-socialist regimes, accusing them of being agents of Western imperialism or advocating fascist reactionism, dissolved these organizations, only to restore them later in the 1960s, under tight state-control. These newly replaced or restored organizations were often granted some degree of autonomy in order to bestow them with a semblance of credibility.<sup>117</sup>

During the period of post-war reconstruction, Poland's need to obtain resources from all sectors of civil society prompted the communists to adopt a relatively liberal law on associations in 1946, which allowed most CSOs, including Catholic groups, to operate freely. This liberal period did not last long, and between 1949 and 1952 all associations were disbanded or forced to merge with state-controlled organizations.<sup>118</sup>

The state-socialist regime's first major crisis occurred in June 1956 when workers in Poznan took to the streets demanding better wages, which soon turned into mass protests against the political system. As the protesters did not communicate and cooperate with other CSOs, they were unable to restrain the rampages of the thousands of

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<sup>115</sup> Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, *(Post) Totalitarian Legacies, Civil Society, and Democracy in Post-Communist Poland, 1989–1993* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University, 1997), 8.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>118</sup> Michael Magner, "Civil Society in Poland after 1989: A Legacy of Socialism?," *Canadian Slavonic Papers*. 47, no. 1 (2005): 52.

sympathetic workers, and the demonstrations were violently put down by the military.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, the protests were not fruitless as the strikes ultimately led to the election of Wladyslaw Gomulka as First Secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party (PZPR) in October 1956. Gomulka, in exchange for gaining the population's passive acceptance of the existing political order, initiated a handful of liberal reforms, during the period known as the "October Thaw." Reforms included acknowledging the development of workers' self-government in factories and, most notably, granting the Catholic Church a high degree of autonomy.<sup>120</sup>

The Catholic Church, because of its historic role in preserving Polish identity, was in a unique position that allowed it to remain the only official structure independent of state institutions throughout Communist rule. The Church boasted a vast organization: at the end of the 1970s it consisted of 14,000 churches across 7,000 parishes and employed about 20,000 priests.<sup>121</sup> The Catholic University of Lublin, the only university behind the Iron Curtain not controlled by the state, and other theological organizations, such as the Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia, were places where people could freely exchange their views and thoughts.<sup>122</sup>

The regime's liberal reforms, however, proved to be temporary in nature, and beginning from the 1960s, the state reversed many of its former reforms, becoming less responsive to societal demands. When in 1968 the regime prohibited the national theatre play *Forefathers' Eve* by Adam Mickiewicz, one of the most famous pieces of Polish resistance literature, student protests broke out demanding freedom of speech and other civil liberties, and they were soon joined by universities from across the country. The regime branded the protests as an anti-Polish Jewish conspiracy and forced half of the Jewish population in Poland to leave the country. Sowing mistrust between the workers and the intelligentsia successfully isolated the student movement from the rest of society

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<sup>119</sup> Lawrence Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier: The Rise of Solidarity in Poland* (Oxford University Press, USA, 1991), 363.

<sup>120</sup> Michal Buchowski, "The Shifting Meanings of Civil and Civic Society in Poland," in *Civil Society: Challenging Western Models.*, ed. Chris Hann and Elizabeth Dunn (London: Routledge, 1996), 86.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

and repressed the remaining protesters.<sup>123</sup> As a consequence of the divisions created within civil society, students, the intelligentsia, and the Catholic Church did not join the workers in their protests two years later.<sup>124</sup>

### C. THE RE-EMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY

In December 1970, a massive increase in food prices sparked workers' protests in Gdansk. Lessons learned from the disaster of the 1956 protests in Poznan, led to the creation of an inter-factory structure to facilitate cooperation between the various working populations, which for the first time also articulated political demands, such as the creation of independent trade unions and publications free from party censorship.<sup>125</sup> The protests were again violently put down by the military, leaving 45 workers dead. The news of the brutality of state repression led to the dismissal of Gomulka and the election of Edward Gierk as First Secretary. Strikes, however, flared up again in Szczecin and Lodz in February the next year prompting the government to revoke the price increase.

As a consequence of the declining economy, social peace did not last long. In June 1976 the government again announced a large increase in consumer prices; workers in Radom and Ursus immediately took to the streets demanding, in addition to a pay rise, the establishment of autonomous union organizations.<sup>126</sup> The regime, while violently repressing the protests, revoked the price hike the same day. Contrary to 1970, this time the intelligentsia and the Catholic Church supported the workers by calling for an end to the repression and assisting the victims of state persecution.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Stefani Sonntag, "Poland," in *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, ed. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 7.

<sup>124</sup> Grzegorz Ekiert and Jan Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993* (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 2001), 33.

<sup>125</sup> Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier*, 377.

<sup>126</sup> Joanna Kurczewska, "Democracy in Poland: Traditions and Contexts," in *Democracy, Civil Society and Pluralism in Comparative Perspective: Poland, Great Britain and the Netherlands*, ed. Christopher G. A Bryant and Edmund Mokrzycki (Warszawa: IFiS Publishers, 1995), 101.

<sup>127</sup> Ekiert and Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993*, 38.

In September 1976, 14 prominent intellectuals established the Committee for the Defense of Workers (KOR) to provide support for the families of imprisoned workers and for those brought before courts. KOR did not commit itself to an ideological perspective in order to prevent barriers, such as those that hampered the effective cooperation of CSOs in 1956 and 1968, from emerging.<sup>128</sup> The organization operated under the banner of openness and truthfulness and thus rejected procedures to detect government infiltrators, trusting those who wished to join the group.<sup>129</sup> KOR did not question the structures of state-socialism; it aimed to establish autonomous social bonds and grassroots associations in order to protect individual rights against totalitarian repression.<sup>130</sup>

The fact that KOR was made up of intellectuals enjoying great respect in Poland provided it with moral legitimacy and a defensive shield against excessive state repression. Thus, when in May 1977 the regime clamped down on the organization arresting many of its members, several groups inside and outside of Poland, as well as the Catholic Church, mounted a campaign in their defense. The regime ultimately had to back off and in July all imprisoned KOR activists were released.<sup>131</sup>

After emerging from prison in 1977, the KOR activists gave up the promotion of independent trade unions and changed their name from KOR to the Committee for Social Self Defense in order to allude to their wider political and cultural task of creating an alternative public space for the democratic opposition in totalitarian Poland.<sup>132</sup> When amid the fear of repression and intimidation the intellectuals of KOR publicly reached out to support those societal groups most in need, they gave birth to the very idea of civil society in Poland.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>128</sup> Sonntag, "Poland," 14.

<sup>129</sup> John S Glaser, *Living Within the Truth: The Rise of Civil Society in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Poland* (Philadelphia, PA: Xlibris, 2005), 214.

<sup>130</sup> Buchowski, "The Shifting Meanings of Civil and Civic Society in Poland," 87.

<sup>131</sup> Michael H Bernhard, *The Origins of Democratization in Poland: Workers, Intellectuals, and Oppositional Politics, 1976–1980* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 121.

<sup>132</sup> Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier*, 368.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 386.

The organization achieved its first success when in July 1977 the government announced an amnesty for all the workers who were imprisoned during the 1976 protests. Following this success, KOR expanded its activities to provide support for victims of any type of human rights abuses.<sup>134</sup> Inspired by KOR's success several opposition groups formed in the second half of the 1970s, such as the Declaration of the Democratic Movement in 1977, the Movement for the Defense of Human and Civil Rights in 1977, the Flying University in 1978 and the Confederation for Independent Poland in 1979, and many of those actively sought cooperation with KOR.<sup>135</sup>

Moreover, promoting the re-emergence of civil society, Polish Cardinal Karol Wojtyla was elected pope in October 1978. Under the name Pope John Paul II, he visited Poland in June 1979, and the open-air church mass he celebrated in front of millions of people helped to lower the barrier of fear and provided an impetus for the emerging alliance of workers, students, intellectuals and the Catholic Church; this led to the foundation of Solidarity a year later.<sup>136</sup>

#### **D. SOLIDARITY IN THE AIR**

In July 1980, a renewed price increase sparked a series of regional workers' strikes, which were initially limited to individual businesses and avoided street demonstrations, as a result of the painful experiences gained in 1956, 1970, and 1976.<sup>137</sup> The government's strategy to appease large striking enterprises through limited concessions encouraged workers across the country to strike for a pay increase and thus the protests continued unabated throughout August.<sup>138</sup> On August 14, the workers of the Lenin Shipyard in Gdansk joined the strikes and, despite the management's concession to their demands, continued with the protests as a sign of solidarity with the workers of other, smaller firms which had less clout and therefore feared repression by the regime. This consciousness of solidarity was based on the strong primary social relations created

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<sup>134</sup> Sonntag, "Poland," 8.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*

among the workers in factories, which endowed them with a sense of class unity and allowed them to reach across different sectors.<sup>139</sup> On August 16, the Inter-Factory Strike Committee (MKS) was founded under the leadership of Lech Walesa in order to represent the mutual interests of both small and large enterprises.<sup>140</sup> Its establishment provided the institutional framework for the emergence of the Solidarity trade union.

The MKS, supported by advisors and experienced opposition lawyers from the KOR and the Clubs of the Catholic Intelligentsia, engaged in negotiations with the government over a list of 21 demands, including the right to create independent trade unions, a reduction in work hours, and free access to the press.<sup>141</sup> Over the following weeks, the government ceded to most demands, and on September 22, 1980, the *Independent and Self-Administrative Trade Union Solidarity* was established, and Lech Walesa was elected as the head of the National Coordinating Commission (KKP), the union's executive organ. Between September and December 1980, Solidarity's membership rose from 750,000 to about ten million, and it was officially registered as an independent labor union outside the trade union apparatus of the state-party in November of that same year.<sup>142</sup> Moreover, Solidarity's huge membership was far from passive; by December 1981 about one-fifth of the Polish population had participated in mass protests at least once.<sup>143</sup>

Over the following months, however, frustration grew among the workers as the government deliberately delayed the implementation of the agreements struck in Gdansk. The growing discontent ultimately culminated in the Bydgoszcz crisis in March 1981, when Solidarity and peasant activists striking at the headquarters of the satellite United Peasants' Party (ZSL) for the creation of an independent farmer's union were brutally

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<sup>139</sup> Michael D Kennedy, *Professionals, Power, and Solidarity in Poland: A Critical Sociology of Soviet-type Society* (Cambridge [England]; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 53.

<sup>140</sup> Michael Magner, *Stalemate in Civil Society: Post-Communist Transition in Poland and the Legacy of Socialism* (Warsaw [Poland]: Oficyna Wydawnicza ASPRA-JR, 2003), 99.

<sup>141</sup> Sonntag, "Poland," 9.

<sup>142</sup> Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier*, 261.

<sup>143</sup> Ekiert and Kubik, *Rebellious Civil Society: Popular Protest and Democratic Consolidation in Poland, 1989–1993*, 40.

beaten up by the police.<sup>144</sup> The KKP denounced the violence and called for an immediate nationwide general strike and a subsequent full-scale government investigation. This proposal, however, was not shared by Walesa who threatened to resign if the KKP did not endorse his call for an interim warning strike followed by a national general strike. The KKP ultimately gave in knowing that mobilization would be less effective with Walesa holding an opposing view.<sup>145</sup>

The national warning strike of March 27, 1981, was a complete success; Poland came to an almost complete standstill with over one million members of the state-party participating in the strike against the will of its leadership.<sup>146</sup> The ensuing negotiations with the government, during which the Roman Catholic Primate took on a role as an intermediary, resulted in a compromise agreement: the regime accepted the right of peasants to form Rural Solidarity but did not commit itself to concrete steps to allow for its creation. Nevertheless, the next day the KKP initiated the process that would lead to the creation of the legal peasants' union in May 1981.<sup>147</sup> Although Rural Solidarity lacked the appeal of Solidarity itself, it became nevertheless an influential actor of civil society with 1,500,000 peasants joining the union out of the 3,500,000 owners of private farms in Poland.<sup>148</sup> In addition, similar to Solidarity, which had many members of the ruling PZPR among its ranks, a significant part of the ZSL's constituency joined Rural Solidarity.<sup>149</sup> This intermixing of memberships led to the emergence of alternative views and promoted internal changes not just in the newly established CSOs, but also in the pillars of the totalitarian state structure. Members of the official state organizations, having joined the emerging civil society forces, did not restrain themselves when it came to participating in collective action. For example, in January 1981, ZSL activists participated in the occupation of administrative offices in Bromberg.<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier*, 262.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 296.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 297.

<sup>148</sup> Magner, "Civil Society in Poland after 1989," 62.

<sup>149</sup> Magner, *Stalemate in civil society*, 103.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 104.

While Walesa got his way and the national general strike was called off, the Bydgoszcz crisis led to the emergence of authoritarian patterns of behavior and a wide variety of dissenting forces within the Solidarity movement who thought that the compromise agreement with the government did not go far enough. The spokesman of Solidarity, Karol Modzelewski, for example, resigned soon after the events of Bydgoszcz, accusing Walesa of acting like a “king.”<sup>151</sup> The emergence of dissenting views became evident during the October convention of Solidarity when Walesa was re-elected as chairman over three opponents, albeit with only 55 percent of the vote. Walesa faced campaign slogans from his adversaries that urged voters to choose between “dictatorship” and “democracy.”<sup>152</sup>

Soon after its creation Solidarity developed a network of local and regional institutions that reached into almost every sphere of Polish society. This vast network had to be administered by a bureaucratic force of over 40,000 people who were paid out of union dues collected and distributed locally (with only three percent going to the KKP), in order to enhance their accountability towards the movement’s rank and file.<sup>153</sup> The power of the purse thus remained firmly in the hands of the movement’s base, which ensured that, despite Walesa’s propensity for authoritarian behavior, overall Solidarity’s leadership was becoming more democratic.<sup>154</sup>

The KKP’s overall strategy, articulated by intellectuals in the leadership, was to keep the state-party alive and thus avoid Soviet intervention and support the government’s austerity measures in exchange for broader popular participation in decision-making.<sup>155</sup> Amidst the worsening of the economic crisis this strategic position was increasingly attacked by dissenting forces among the rank and file within Solidarity, which demanded a more radical posture vis-à-vis the state. The Club for the Service of

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<sup>151</sup> Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier*, 298.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>153</sup> *Ibid.*, 902.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 309.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 910.

Independence, for example, called for free national elections, while the National Federation of Self-Governing Bodies proposed “active strikes” where workers would distribute their products directly to the population.<sup>156</sup>

Despite the blossoming of civil society in Poland, political opportunities for further liberalization were in decline by the summer of 1981. The Soviets, who viewed the democratization of Polish society with suspicion, decided to refrain from intervening in Poland only when General Wojciech Jaruzelski, who was elected prime minister just before the Bydgoszcz incident in March 1981, promised that the Polish army would repress Solidarity in due course.<sup>157</sup> When workers took to the streets across the country in early October as a result of food shortages and sharp price increases, Jaruzelski, as the new First Secretary, saw this as justification to commence preparations for martial law.<sup>158</sup> On December 13, 1981, Poland was effectively put under military occupation. In the ensuing period all forms of autonomous associational life, such as Solidarity and Rural Solidarity, were disbanded and members of opposition movements were jailed en masse.

## **E. FROM REPRESSION TO DEMOCRATIZATION**

Contrary to the regime’s efforts to atomize society and strangle the burgeoning civil society with martial law, CSOs maintained the spirit of Solidarity and continued to cooperate even under adverse circumstances. Most notably, the Catholic Church, which retained its independence, provided shelter for dissidents and autonomous cultural activity in its institutions.<sup>159</sup> Similarly, the Polish Red Cross furnished assistance to imprisoned Solidarity activists and distributed international aid to people in need.<sup>160</sup> Moreover, small, loosely connected groups of friends, the Committees for Social Resistance (KOS), called for the self-organization of an underground society that would

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<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 261.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>159</sup> Buchowski, “The Shifting Meanings of Civil and Civic Society in Poland,” 86.

<sup>160</sup> Magner, “Civil Society in Poland after 1989,” 56.

ultimately lead to the liberalization of Poland.<sup>161</sup> This underground society was constituted by a variety of mutual support systems, communication networks, discussion clubs, independent education and publications, and its members often engaged in a boycott of official institutions.<sup>162</sup>

Despite the regime's hopes to return to the status quo before Solidarity, this did not occur after the lifting of martial law in 1983. Instead, a wide array of social initiatives emerged, and because there was no overarching movement to unify them, society as a whole became much less controllable by the state and the former opposition leaders. The new social movements, such as the environmental movement, usually avoided co-optation by the state. On the one hand, the regime was not able to offer meaningful incentives in exchange for political quiescence due to the increasing economic hardships. And on the other hand, the existence of a more radical political opposition, such as KOS, lowered the barrier of fear against state repression for the activists of these movements and made them more willing to cooperate with each other.<sup>163</sup> Moreover, as the issues promoted by these new social movements usually touched upon pressing concerns of Polish society (such as environmental pollution), the government, in order to avoid oppositional involvement, often engaged in direct negotiations with the representatives of these social initiatives, which raised public awareness over the issues in question and led to the empowerment of these groups.<sup>164</sup> Thus, even though Solidarity was outlawed, its spirit created political opportunities for emerging social movements by expanding the space available to public dialogue on "nonpolitical" issues.<sup>165</sup>

One of these new emerging social movements was the Freedom and Peace Movement (WiP), which was founded in April 1985, by activists from the banned Independent Student Union. The group formed in response to a young draftee's

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<sup>161</sup> Marta Toch, *Reinventing Civil Society: Poland's Quiet Revolution, 1981–1986* (New York, NY: U.S. Helsinki Watch Committee, 1986), 5.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>163</sup> Barbara E Hicks, *Environmental Politics in Poland: A Social Movement Between Regime and Opposition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 11.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

sentencing to two-and-a-half years in prison for his refusal to take the military oath. Although WiP had only a core of about one hundred activists, their perseverance in the face of state repression and their ability to take advantage of the organized structures of the opposition (e.g., the underground press), coupled with the occasional assistance and protection provided by the Church, allowed the peace movement to survive.<sup>166</sup> The movement also avoided regime co-optation by refusing to cooperate with the official All-Poland Committee of Peace (OKP) which was under strict state control. It did, however, cooperate with other civil society forces, such as human rights groups and the environmental movement, by putting human rights and ecological issues on their agenda.<sup>167</sup> WiP's legitimacy among the opposition was greatly enhanced when it attained freedom for its imprisoned activists, who remained behind bars even after the Jaruzelski regime announced a limited amnesty for political prisoners in June 1986. WiP further gained exposure by informing foreign audiences about the prisoners' fate, thus putting pressure on the state-party, which did not want to risk losing much needed foreign loans in the face of increasing economic problems.<sup>168</sup> Moreover, the peace movement also achieved one of its main goals when the government, not wanting to risk its new liberal image in front of international donors, legalized the alternative service in early 1988 for those who objected to military service.<sup>169</sup>

Jaruzelski, by introducing a limited form of political liberalization, hoped to obtain the support of the opposition's leadership for his economic reforms. However, following the call of Solidarity's former leadership over 50 percent of the population refused to agree to the regime's reform plans in a referendum in November 1987; at that time, the regime became convinced that it could not govern without the support of

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<sup>166</sup> Christopher Lazarski, "The Polish Independent Peace Movement," in *In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (New York: Routledge, 1990), 123.

<sup>167</sup> Vladimir Tismaneanu, "Unofficial Peace Activism in the Soviet Union and East-Central Europe," in *In Search of Civil Society: Independent Peace Movements in the Soviet Bloc*, ed. Vladimir Tismaneanu (New York: Routledge, 1990), 41.

<sup>168</sup> Lazarski, "The Polish Independent Peace Movement," 125–126.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 126.

society.<sup>170</sup> Thus, when price increases triggered massive wildcat strikes in May and August 1988, the government, through the president of the Warsaw Club of Catholic Intelligentsia, engaged in secret talks with the former leaders of Solidarity.<sup>171</sup>

By the late 1980s the still illegal Solidarity was not the only labor union vying for the support of workers. The semi-autonomous, decentralized All-Poland Alliance of Trade Unions (OPZZ), formed in November 1984 to replace the recently dissolved state-controlled Communist Trade Union (CRZZ), became a formidable contender since it claimed to organize over 60 percent of the Polish workforce.<sup>172</sup> The competition for new members and resources between the two major labor organizations led to higher militancy and a growth in protest actions, as both the OPZZ and Solidarity were recruiting supporters mainly from the same constituency.<sup>173</sup>

When on December 18, 1988, the Solidarity Citizens' Committee (KO'S') was formed in Warsaw to engage in formal negotiations with the regime, the long-standing dispute between workers and intellectuals put on the sidelines by the martial law re-emerged again. While workers prevailed throughout Solidarity's legal existence, the newly established KO'S' was dominated by intellectuals, especially from the capital, and workers, farmers and women were only sparsely represented.<sup>174</sup> Thus, during roundtable negotiations preparing the ground for pluralism in Poland through a four-year transition period, the working-class character of Solidarity was severely weakened. The self-appointed elite of the KO'S' also disrupted the relationship between the leadership and the rank and file of the movement, which had been maintained by the democratically elected KKP during the fifteen months of Solidarity's legal existence.<sup>175</sup> Disputes about the undemocratic nature of the KO'S' led to the resignation of three of its original

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<sup>170</sup> John K Glenn, *Framing Democracy: Civil Society and Civic Movements in Eastern Europe* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 73.

<sup>171</sup> Sonntag, "Poland," 12.

<sup>172</sup> Ekiert and Kubik, *(Post) Totalitarian Legacies, Civil Society, and Democracy in Post-Communist Poland, 1989–1993*, 14.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>174</sup> Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier*, 342.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*, 345.

members, including that of former KOR activist and later Prime Minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki.<sup>176</sup> The intellectuals of the KO'S' defended the undemocratic process of their selection by arguing that a re-established KKP would have implied too many divergent views and factions to function effectively during the negotiations with the regime; moreover they knew better what was best for Poland.<sup>177</sup> Thus, in this period of transition, Solidarity struggled to regain the popularity and strength it enjoyed in 1980–1981, boasting a membership that was only a fraction of its former self. By mid-1989 the re-legalized Solidarity had only managed to recruit two million members as opposed to the former ten million. Moreover the staff was constituted mainly of newcomers; only 30 percent of the members of the KO'S' were trade union activists in 1980–1981.<sup>178</sup>

Since Solidarity lost much of its former appeal, the opposition represented in the roundtable talks began to focus on organizing local Citizens' Committees across Poland. Most of Solidarity's new membership was again made up of the industrial working class; therefore, the movement's leadership promoted the recruitment of the white-collar social classes to the Citizens' Committees, which foretold the upcoming interest group struggle over who would bear the brunt of the inevitable economic adjustment programs.<sup>179</sup>

The roundtable negotiations, during which the Catholic Church played a significant role as an intermediary between the opposition and the government, aimed to support the legalization of Solidarity but also to have a moderating effect on excessive oppositional demands. The talks ultimately ended in an agreement on April 5 that led to the re-legalization of Solidarity, Rural Solidarity and the Independent Student Union, and called for semi-democratic elections in June.<sup>180</sup> Under the terms of the agreement only 35 percent of the seats in the Sejm (Poland's legislative assembly) were eligible for the opposition, while all one hundred seats of a new-to-be-established Senate were to be

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<sup>176</sup> Glenn, *Framing Democracy*, 105.

<sup>177</sup> Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier*, 345.

<sup>178</sup> Ekiert and Kubik, *(Post) Totalitarian Legacies, Civil Society, and Democracy in Post-Communist Poland, 1989–1993*, 14.

<sup>179</sup> Goodwyn, *Breaking the Barrier*, 348.

<sup>180</sup> Sonntag, "Poland," 13.

elected democratically. The elections resulted in an overwhelming victory for Solidarity: it obtained 99 seats in the Senate and 35 percent of the mandates in the Sejm. Moreover, the former satellite parties, the ZSL and the Democratic Party defected from the government, which enabled Solidarity to form a coalition government despite the limits put on opposition participation in the elections. On August 25, Tadeusz Mazowiecki became the first non-communist prime minister in a Warsaw Pact country.<sup>181</sup>

Solidarity's overwhelming victory was a result of the comprehensive oppositional identity it created during the roundtable talks. Despite the regime's efforts to conduct the negotiations with several separate groups (such as the OPZZ, women's groups, and Catholic groups), the opposition managed to frame the talks as a two-party negotiation between the government and Solidarity.<sup>182</sup> In addition, the key to the opposition's successful efforts of mobilization was the transformation of local parishes and Clubs of Catholic Intelligentsia into local Citizens' Committees.<sup>183</sup> Thus, "[b]y linking support for Solidarity with the Church, voting became part of the duty of all Catholics in Poland."<sup>184</sup>

## F. CONCLUSION

Although Poland ultimately celebrated its first fully democratic elections in October 1991, two years after the 1989 round table negotiations, by that time the country was firmly on the path of becoming a liberal democracy. Moreover, Poland was the first country in the former Eastern Bloc where civil society engaged in negotiations with the regime over the peaceful transition to democracy. Having been under martial law during the early 1980s, the sudden crumbling of the repressive regime (which was made complete by the overwhelming electoral victory of the political opposition in the summer of 1989) was unexpected on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Naturally, Gorbachev's renunciation of the Brezhnev Doctrine provided the necessary political opportunity to begin deconstructing the state-socialist system. Without the presence of a good civil

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<sup>181</sup> The last remnant of the roundtable agreement was eliminated by the first completely democratic parliamentary elections in October 1991, when 69 parties competed for all the seats in the Sejm.

<sup>182</sup> Glenn, *Framing Democracy*, 84–85.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 109.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

society, however, the smooth transition to democracy would have been hardly possible. In the following paragraphs the arguments for the “goodness” of Polish civil society are proposed.

Participation in associational life and collective action was extraordinary throughout most periods of Polish state-socialism. This was true not just during the relatively liberal period of the late 1970s, and especially throughout the 15 months of Solidarity’s legal existence, but also when civil society was reduced to the mere presence of official state associations during earlier, more repressive times. Contrary to common belief, the mandatory membership in these large organizations, despite their apolitical nature, was almost never just formal. People were obliged to take part actively in the associational life of these organizations (such as the pioneer movement for the youth and the “obligatory” May Day parades), which taught them the foundations of collective action. Not surprisingly, many of these official associations, especially professional organizations, became hotbeds of public dissent during the 1980s.<sup>185</sup>

Moreover, participation in unauthorized collective action was higher in Poland than in other countries of the Eastern Bloc, where regimes were usually able to buy off popular dissent. In Poland, on the other hand, even though regime repression was similar to that of other state-socialist countries, workers (and not just workers as the case of the 1968 student movements shows) repeatedly took to the streets to demand economic improvement, and throughout the 1970s, increasingly political concessions. In addition, the birth of the Solidarity movement in 1980 introduced a new dimension of collective participation, when workers continued with their strikes to support other protesters even after their own initial demands had been met.

Finally, in terms of sheer numbers participation in associational life was also extremely high in Poland. Naturally, due to their mandatory nature membership in state organizations was almost equivalent with the respective numbers of the total populace (the CRZZ, for example, boasted a membership of nearly 12,000,000 in the 1970s). But surprisingly, once the barrier of fear came down as a result of mass collective action and

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<sup>185</sup> Buchowski, “The Shifting Meanings of Civil and Civic Society in Poland,” 84.

state retreat, participation in voluntary movements also skyrocketed with Solidarity boasting an astonishing membership of 10,000,000 in a country of 35,000,000.<sup>186</sup>

Although being limited in their political agenda, CSOs in Poland nevertheless developed a sense of empowerment vis-à-vis the state. In their struggle for concessions CSOs were naturally aided by the low social legitimacy of the regime and the collective actions of workers, whose demands for better living conditions were usually met by the state. This of course encouraged other civil society forces (such as KOR) to press on with their demands and the state often had to give in to retain a modicum of legitimacy. After the regime lifted martial law, the empowerment of civil society was aided by two additional factors. First, the worsening economic situation increasingly forced the regime to resort to economic aid coming from international donors (mostly Western countries), which usually provided their assistance on the basis of certain conditions. By pointing to areas where the state did not honor its commitments, this increasingly enabled CSOs to put pressure on the regime.

Moreover, after the slackening of state repression and the release of former Solidarity leaders from prisons, the regime was increasingly facing a potent political opposition whose empowerment it had already witnessed and feared during Solidarity's legal existence. This momentum enabled emerging social movements that were not or were only loosely connected to this opposition to conduct a public discourse on issues that were deemed apolitical in nature. As the regime did not want to fuel opposition activity the bar for "political correctness" was set higher and higher. The ultimate empowerment Polish civil society achieved was during the roundtable talks in early 1989 when CSOs sat down with the government to negotiate as an equal partner. Having achieved this status, democratic transition became only a matter of time.

While it is obvious to equate the autonomy of Polish civil society with the forming of the independent trade unions in general, and the creation of Solidarity in particular, it is also important to note that it was with the emerging intellectual movements in the second half of the 1970s (most notably KOR) that independence first

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<sup>186</sup> Magner, *Stalemate in civil society*, 67.

took root in civil society. Those movements resisted co-optation by the state and operated openly to underline their independence from the regime. Later, between September 1980 and December 1981, a myriad of CSOs experienced for the first time the merits of autonomous collective action. Although the burgeoning independent associational life was abruptly put to an end by the introduction of martial law, civil society did not regress completely into a sphere devoid of any autonomy. On the one hand, after the experience of Solidarity, the regime usually had to grant the newly established CSOs (such as the OPZZ) some autonomy in order for them to retain at least some credibility. On the other hand, even though the public space available to it was limited, the main goal of the underground civil society with its network of “virtual” CSOs created by the dissidents was to gain an autonomous space devoid of state interference. Finally, the uniqueness of Polish civil society was given by the fact that throughout the period of state-socialism it could resort to a largely independent Catholic Church, whose institutions provided a venue for alternative views and thoughts.

Solidarity, being a mass movement incorporating the majority of the Polish adult population, was laced with cross-cutting cleavages. After all, Solidarity’s very existence was based on the notion of workers reaching out to other, unknown workers, which later evolved into an alliance of workers, professionals and intellectuals of all classes and from all over the country. To underline the movement’s kitchen-sink nature, it was joined by people from both sides of the ideological divide; many members of the PZPR also joined Solidarity without perceiving an incompatibility of interests of the two organizations. Naturally, all this implied that a wide array of thoughts and beliefs clashed together within the movement that led to the emergence of dissent and competition. In the process, however, often people’s own views and beliefs changed, transforming their organizations of origin, and thus, society itself.

Moreover, apart from Solidarity, the Catholic Church’s role was also important in strengthening cross-cutting cleavages. Playing the role of an intermediary, it first brought together the workers and the intelligentsia and enabled later the negotiations between the regime and the opposition. Its churches, parishes and other institutions provided shelter for people regardless of class and ideology, which furthered the intermixing of views and

ideas. After all, while Solidarity managed to unite a significant portion of the populace against totalitarianism, the Church's role in preserving Polish identity provided it with a symbolic force that transcended class and ideological boundaries.

In terms of a liberal-pluralist past, Poland already enjoyed a relatively vibrant civil society before the Communist takeover. The regime's attempts to eradicate the collective memory of this past failed miserably when, beginning from the late 1970s, civil society began to reinvent itself culminating in the emergence of Solidarity. In order to deal a mortal blow to civil society, as a last-ditch effort the state-socialist party introduced martial law, but by that time it was already too late. During the 15 months of Solidarity civil society had developed a robust structure of political opportunity "holdovers," which allowed the dissidents to create a parallel civil society that would outlast martial law and put Poland on the path of democratization.

Finally, and probably most importantly, civil society in Poland abounded in civility and its inherent values. Most notably, the ultimate success of Polish civil society showed the importance of cooperation. As long as CSOs acted on their own, like the workers in 1956 and 1970, or the intelligentsia in 1968, they achieved only limited success. When they acted together, however, the power of the regime began to erode quickly. But what was the underlying basis for the cooperation of the different actors of society? It was primarily the ethical code of a self-limiting civil society, which did not challenge the power of the state-party and advocated values such as human rights, dignity and openness that brought together the Catholic Church and the intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s in their efforts to support the striking workers.<sup>187</sup>

The workers on the other hand soon recognized that if they wanted lasting results, cooperation among themselves, as the brutally suppressed strikes on the Baltic coast in 1970 showed, was not enough, and thus, they gladly accepted the helping hand of the Church and the intelligentsia in 1976. The strength of this triangle of cooperation was revealed by the events leading to the emergence of Solidarity and the sudden retreat of the regime. Ultimately, cooperation achieved a new dimension when the various forces of

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<sup>187</sup> Glenn, *Framing Democracy*, 59.

civil society, such as Solidarity, the OPZZ, women's groups and Catholic organizations, spoke with one voice during the roundtable talks to form a unified opposition able to challenge the regime. Eventually, this cooperation fell apart after having successfully put Poland on the path of transition, but after all, it is the competition of divergent views and beliefs that make democracy work.

Naturally, cooperation also implied the presence of trust and reciprocity, which were first embraced by the intellectuals of KOR in 1976, when they openly provided aid for workers in need. Remarkably, these values did not disappear even after the introduction of martial law, when providing aid to dissidents and people in need could incur harsh repression if revealed by the authorities. Lastly, the whole movement of Solidarity, with the wealth of views, thoughts and beliefs it encompassed, would not have worked without tolerance being its guiding principle.

When Solidarity emerged victorious from the elections in June 1989 and Poland embarked on its irreversible road to democratization, the rapid collapse of the state-socialist regime might have astonished many observers, but as this chapter has shown the ultimate outcome was by no means a surprise. While favorable changes in the political opportunity structure led to the rapid dismantling of the totalitarian regime, it was a Polish civil society displaying all characteristics of a good civil society that firmly set Poland on course to becoming a liberal democracy.

## IV. RUSSIA: CIVIL SOCIETY LEFT ON THE SIDELINES

### A. INTRODUCTION

When the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) formally ceased to exist on December 26, 1991, hopes in the West were high that a democratic Russia would emerge from the ruins of the former Cold War enemy. After all, the economic and political reforms of Gorbachev, enshrined in the policies of *perestroika* and *glasnost*, were rightfully regarded as having precipitated the dissolution of the totalitarian regime. Moreover, when Gorbachev, having released the genie from the bottle, desperately tried to backtrack on his liberal policies, he was effectively countered and later deposed by Boris Yeltsin, Russia's new democratically elected President. However, Yeltsin, striving to strengthen his presidential powers, soon became oblivious to the support he received from the democratic movement in his struggle against Gorbachev and instead surrounded himself with the former members of the Soviet political elite, the *nomenklatura*. Thus, instead of a democratic polity, the dissolution of the Soviet Union saw the emergence of a semi-authoritarian Russia governed by a personalist, populist and plebiscitary regime left largely unchecked by a stunted civil society.<sup>188</sup>

The following analysis sheds light on why civil society was unable to contribute to Russia's further democratization. Drawing from the criteria established in Chapter II, Russia's civil society will be evaluated by that criteria (see Table 1). This chapter argues that, although Russia boasted a relatively vibrant associational life in the 1920s, during the Stalinist period, the embryonic beginnings of civil society were completely erased by the totalitarian regime. Civil society was not able to recover from this trauma until the second half of the 1980s, when Gorbachev's reforms provided favorable political opportunities for the re-emergence of autonomous collective action. However, trying to reconstitute itself, civil society lacked the necessary uniting factors, such as solidarity, cooperation and a common "enemy" that would have enabled it to ward off the political

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<sup>188</sup> Graeme J. Gill and Roger D. Markwick, *Russia's Stillborn Democracy? From Gorbachev to Yeltsin* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 257.

elite's attempts of co-optation. Thus, reduced to being a football for power-brokers in the struggle for political supremacy in the early 1990s, civil society failed to push the emerging Russian Federation towards greater democratization.

## **B. EARLY TRACES OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

At the end of the Tsarist period, Russia showed traces of a nascent civil society as a result of the vibrant associational activity of citizens taking advantage of the limited public space granted by the authoritarian state, such as professional associations of engineers and teachers, mutual aid societies, groups focusing on art and associations protecting public health.<sup>189</sup> Despite closing many prerevolutionary social organizations and, most notably, severely restricting the autonomy of the Russian Orthodox Church, voluntary associations continued to flourish even after the Communist takeover and well into the 1920s with a host of fairly independent workers' clubs emerging and writers enjoying a high degree of freedom. After Joseph Stalin assumed full control of the Soviet Union at the end of 1928, the opportunities for voluntary civic activism and for independent trade unionism, however, were gradually abolished, and by 1932, the majority of autonomous CSOs were liquidated.<sup>190</sup>

In order to channel and contain civic action, the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) created a network of official organizations encompassing all major social groups, such as the mass youth organization Komsomol, the Union of Writers and various peasants,' workers' and women's councils. Instead of representing the interests of their constituencies, these bureaucratic and hierarchical organizations primarily served the needs of the regime elite, leaving little room for independent grassroots activism.<sup>191</sup> Alternative thought and action emerged only after the Twentieth Party Congress of the CPSU in 1956. This period ushered in the era of de-Stalinization heralded by Nikita

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<sup>189</sup> Mary Schaeffer Conroy, "Civil Society in Late Imperial Russia," in *Russian Civil Society: A Critical Assessment*, ed. Alfred B Evans, Laura A Henry, and Lisa McIntosh Sundstrom (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 18.

<sup>190</sup> Alfred B Evans, "Civil Society in the Soviet Union?," in Evans, Henry, and Sundstrom, *Russian Civil Society*, 35.

<sup>191</sup> Judith B Sedaitis and Jim Butterfield, "The Emergence of Social Movements in the Soviet Union," in *Perestroika from Below: Social Movements in the Soviet Union*, ed. Judith B Sedaitis and Jim Butterfield (Boulder: Westview, 1991), 7.

Khrushchev and manifested by the quasi-public criticism of the cult of personality, the strengthening of collective decision-making at the top of the state-party and the relative decline in state repression. In the ensuing period the regime cut back efforts to control every aspect of daily life, and while political protest continued to be suppressed, repression was mostly directed against persons publicly breaking the rules.<sup>192</sup> Moreover, the regime relaxed the restrictions imposed on culture in order to counterbalance the crisis of legitimacy it had brought upon itself by its criticism of Stalinism. This cultural opening facilitated the emergence of alternative views and thoughts, particularly among the urban youth and the intelligentsia, and the arts and literature became the first areas where values such as solidarity, inner freedom and creativity could be expressed.<sup>193</sup> Another area where the “thaw” initiated by Khrushchev spurred the emergence of critical thinking was the practice of science, which was reflected in the high proportion of academicians among future dissidents.<sup>194</sup> The period of political liberalization, however, was short-lived and between the end of the 1950s and the early 1960s, the regime again increased repression against critical intellectuals.

### C. THE HUMAN RIGHTS MOVEMENT

A turning point in the emergence of the political dissident movement was the trial against the writers Andrei Sinyavsky and Yuli Daniel, who were sentenced to prison in 1965 for unauthorized publishing in the West.<sup>195</sup> In response, 80 intellectuals, including 60 members of the state controlled Union of Writers, fearing a relapse into the excessive repression of the Stalinist era, signed 22 open letters of protest addressing the restrictions of individual rights and freedom. In the ensuing period occasional and isolated protest actions were held in several cities in defense of human and minority rights, as well as against the conduct of political trials and the invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1968.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Viktor Voronkov and Jan Wielgohs, “Soviet Russia,” in *Dissent and Opposition in Communist Eastern Europe: Origins of Civil Society and Democratic Transition*, ed. Detlef Pollack and Jan Wielgohs (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 99.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 101.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 102.

A more structured dissident movement emerged when the *samizdat* (self-published) bulletin *Chronicle of Current Events* was created by representatives of the critical intelligentsia on April 30, 1968, which despite repressive measures against the authors became the center of political dissent in general, and of human rights in particular, for the next 15 years.<sup>197</sup> Several human rights groups operated under the umbrella of the Chronicle. Created in 1969, *The Initiative for the Protection of Human Rights in the USSR* was the first Soviet human rights group with an informal membership of 15 people, predominantly from Moscow. Issuing collective petitions and open letters of protest, the group was dissolved in 1974 after several of its members were arrested. *The Committee for Human Rights in the USSR* was founded in November 1970 in Moscow by eight well-known intellectuals, including Academy of Sciences member Andrei Sakharov and writer Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. Amidst massive repression it only operated until the end of 1973; despite this it became the first independent formal association of citizens in the post-Stalinist period. *The Assistance Group for the Implementation of the Helsinki Accords*, also known as the Moscow Helsinki Group (MHG), was founded on May 12, 1976, by eleven activists, and continued to operate until 1982, when almost all of its members were arrested.<sup>198</sup> While the MHG managed to professionalize human rights work by engaging in activities such as the collection and publication of information on human rights violations and offering assistance to the victims of repression it also lost touch with the broader milieu of critical intellectuals primarily focused on cultural dissidence, leading to the group's increased isolation.<sup>199</sup> Finally, The Relief Fund for Political Prisoners and Their Families was created in 1974 on the initiative of Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn and Aleksandr Ginzburg. It aimed to provide financial and legal support to the victims of political trials and was a precursor to similar

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<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 104.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid.

dissident organizations abroad, such as KOR in Poland. Despite the arrests of several of its founding members, the group's reliance on predominantly foreign funding allowed it to continue its activities until 1984.<sup>200</sup>

Following the Soviet Army's invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979 and Solidarity's emergence in Poland in 1980, the repression against the human rights movement intensified during the final years of the Brezhnev and the Andropov regimes in 1982–1983. Leading human rights activists, such as Andrei Sakharov, were either exiled or arrested or they emigrated abroad.<sup>201</sup> Having emerged in the late 1960s, the Soviet human rights movement ultimately received its mortal blow with the dissolution of the *samizdat* Chronicle of Current Events in 1983.

Acknowledging the need for greater social involvement in policy making in 1986, Mikhail Gorbachev introduced the concept of *glasnost*, an increased openness and transparency in handling government information and activities, primarily in order to gain the support of the intelligentsia for his reform initiatives. Gorbachev's liberalizing policies led to the emergence of thousands of voluntary associations. According to official estimates by the end of 1987, about 30,000 informal associations existed and a year later their number had doubled. Gorbachev's policies also led the revitalization of the human rights movement.<sup>202</sup>

In the second half of the 1980s, the first advocates of a new human rights movement in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) were also released political prisoners campaigning for the freedom of their imprisoned inmates. The first of these groups was created in Moscow in 1987. Despite being active in staging demonstrations its protests usually involved only a couple of people; this was largely due to the lack of cooperation with other CSOs.<sup>203</sup> Another human rights group, Press Club Glasnost (PCG), was more successful in attracting public interest. Established by well-

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 106.

<sup>202</sup> Sedaitis and Butterfield, "The Emergence of Social Movements in the Soviet Union," 1.

<sup>203</sup> Lûdmila Alekseeva, *Nyeformaly: Civil Society in the USSR* (New York, NY: Helsinki Watch, 1990), 18.

known human rights activists in July 1987, PCG's main goal was to provide a forum for discussions on human rights issues for people with different social backgrounds.<sup>204</sup> In July 1989 the PCG reorganized itself in order to reconstitute the MHG, which had been disbanded in 1982. In efforts to take the wind out of the sails of the thriving human rights movement, the regime established the Public Commission for International Cooperation on Humanitarian Problems and Human Rights in November 1987. Highlighting that its 55-person membership included prominent Soviet writers, scientists, lawyers and church leaders, and that its activities were financed by the Soviet Peace Fund, a collection of voluntary donations from ordinary citizens, the Public Commission made great efforts to prove its independence.<sup>205</sup> Nevertheless, it enjoyed many privileges compared to other unregistered human rights groups, such as having official premises, being able to organize trips to the West and officially receiving guests. These benefits exposed its government-backed status.<sup>206</sup>

#### **D. THE ENVIRONMENTAL MOVEMENT**

The 1950s and 1960s saw the emergence of environmentalism in the RSFSR. The memberships of environmental groups boomed as people of different societal backgrounds joined the emerging organizations. One of the earliest representatives of the environmental movement was the All-Russian Society for Conservation (VOOP) created in 1924. Having been dissolved during the period of Stalinism, it resumed its activities in the wake of the liberal policies of the Khrushchev regime in the second half of the 1950s. VOOP regained and even extended its former membership with more than 1,000,000 people participating in its public campaigns, such as the identification of environmental malpractice and the cleaning up of small rivers.<sup>207</sup> As a result of its success in mobilizing people VOOP soon encountered the limits of Khrushchev's political liberalization when the regime co-opted its leadership and thus effectively deprived the organization of its

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid.

<sup>205</sup> Ibid., 22–24.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 24–25.

<sup>207</sup> Natalia Mirovitskaya, "The Environmental Movement in the Former Soviet Union," in *Environment and Society in Eastern Europe*, ed. Andrew Tickle and Ian Welsh (Harlow, Essex [England]; New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1998), 37.

autonomy. Therefore, despite becoming the largest environmental organization in the world by the mid-1980s, with a membership exceeding 37 million, VOOB's co-opted status prohibited it from exerting meaningful influence on state-policies.<sup>208</sup>

In the late 1950s, plans to develop the area surrounding Lake Baikal, which is the largest reservoir of fresh water on Earth and a national symbol to Russians, unleashed a public movement in the defense of the lake; this protest lasted for decades. The movement's campaigns, which united members of the Academy of Science, prominent figures of the intelligentsia, students and journalists, while not succeeding in halting industrial development in the region, led to the implementation of strict environmental protocols.<sup>209</sup>

The late 1960s saw the emergence of the militant Students' Nature Protection Corps, which soon replaced the co-opted VOOB as a home for liberal urban thinkers, students, engineers and radicals seeking autonomy from the state. While by the late 1980s the Students' Corps had more than 100 affiliates across the country with a membership of 3500, its strategies of exposing game poaching and other forms of illegal environmental activities did little to influence policy-makers.<sup>210</sup>

Following a decline in activism in the 1970s and early 1980s, the environmental movement re-emerged again in the second half of the 1980s in the wake of Gorbachev's reform policies, which underlined the importance of environmental protection. The regime established the *All-Union Committee on Environmental Protection* to highlight its commitment towards environmentalism. In order to endow the organization with a modicum of legitimacy a non-Party chair was appointed under the leadership of Nikolai Vorontsov, a leading scholar at the Academy of Sciences. On the one hand, this provided the Committee with some independence, and on the other hand, due to Vorontsov's personal contacts in the Kremlin, the organization had significant influence on the adoption of the first Soviet State Environmental Program in 1990.<sup>211</sup>

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<sup>208</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>210</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 39.

The new liberal political environment, however, provided opportunities not just for the introduction of top-down environmental initiatives; it also saw the emergence of a grassroots environmental movement. By 1990, the number of registered environmental groups was around 1,000.<sup>212</sup> They boasted a wide range of memberships, organized public protests, petitions and strikes, and cooperated with anti-military and nationalist movements in order to influence decision-makers. Due to the state-party's increasing responsiveness in the area of environmental protection and the arising political opportunities this interest presented, these environmental groups achieved some notable successes. Beginning in 1988, for example, a campaign against the production of artificial protein concentrate started by ten residents in the town of Kirishi, near Leningrad, evolved into a mass movement encompassing several cities across the country and involving protests in which 10,000 to 15,000 people participated. As a result of the protests, the regime ultimately prohibited the production of artificial protein concentrate throughout the country in 1991.<sup>213</sup> Moreover, a number of umbrella groups emerged to coordinate environmental activities at the regional and national level. The Socio-ecological Union, for example, waged a nation-wide campaign against the construction of the Volga-Chograi canal, involving demonstrations in over one hundred cities joined by 500,000 people and collecting more than one million signatures, which ultimately forced the government to cancel the project.<sup>214</sup>

In addition, in many republics of the Soviet Union, especially in the Baltic region, ecological concerns were embraced by the nationalist Popular Fronts seeking independence from Moscow, which led to the emergence of a coalition between green movements and nationalist movements within and also across several republics.<sup>215</sup> While in several republics the politicization of environmentalism thrived and public trust in the environmental movement was high, in the RSFSR the development of these movements was hindered by the lack of a unifying nationalism, the vast geographical distances

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<sup>212</sup> Ibid.

<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>215</sup> Ibid., 42.

separating people and the absence of effective means of communication to bridge those distances.<sup>216</sup> Moreover, the effectiveness of the environmental movement, despite these early successes, soon declined when the dissolution of the CPSU in August 1991 deprived the politically diverse memberships from an ideologically uniting “enemy,” and the shock therapies adopted in the wake of wide-ranging economic problems brushed aside ecological concerns in Russia.<sup>217</sup>

#### **E. THE PEACE MOVEMENT**

One of the few associations surviving the heightened repression of the Andropov era was the Moscow Trust Group (MTG), founded in June 1982 by 11 intellectuals from Moscow with the aim to foster détente between the East and the West, promote human rights, and establish a “four-sided dialogue” between Soviet and American leaders and societies, in order to increase trust. While the MTG initially consisted of the founding intellectuals, later it was joined by young artists and writers from the samizdat scene, scientists, religious activists and university students.<sup>218</sup> As a result of disagreement among the founding members about the MTG’s relationship with the state, however, and most likely with the active support of state authorities, in January 1983 some members split off the MTG to create the Friendship and Dialogue group. The new splinter group, with an active core of about 40 people consisting primarily of members of the intelligentsia, denied that peace activists were subject to state harassment in the Soviet Union and thus, never developed cooperation with the MTG, whose activists were often arrested by the regime.<sup>219</sup> Having been denied official registration, the MTG’s first public protest against the use of nuclear energy in May 1986 was followed by harsh repression against its activists. The fear of repression had a detrimental

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<sup>216</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>218</sup> Tismaneanu, “Unofficial Peace Activism in the Soviet Union and East-Central Europe,” 42.

<sup>219</sup> Eduard Kuznetsov, “The Independent Peace Movement in the USSR,” in Tismaneanu, *In Search of Civil Society*, 60.

effect not just on the group's core membership, which did not exceed 15 to 30 people in 1989, but also on the protests organized by the group, which were fairly frequent but usually involved only a few dozens of people.<sup>220</sup>

Despite its small size and the limited public space available, the MTG maintained close contact with similar groups across the country and from the West, and especially with various pacifist youth associations such as the "Toadstools," a group of young artists and actors primarily from Moscow, who focused on raising public awareness about state oppression.<sup>221</sup> Moreover, by the second half of the 1980s, in the wake of Gorbachev's liberalizing policies and the growing dissatisfaction with the war in Afghanistan, the MTG's public acceptance significantly increased, forcing the authorities to establish formal contact with the group when one of its activists was permitted to give an official speech at the Fourth International Meeting Dialogue of peace activists in Moscow in May 1987.<sup>222</sup>

Alarmed by the peace movement's growing popularity and not being able to control the outburst of popular initiatives, the regime took active steps to limit the public space available to informal associations. In July 1988, a decree was issued restricting rallies and demonstrations, and in April 1989, another decree limited the freedom of speech. Moreover, the CPSU engaged in creating state-sponsored groups with agendas similar to that of the new CSOs, such as the Public Commission for International Cooperation on Humanitarian Problems and Human Rights or Green World, with the ultimate aim to delegitimize independent grassroots initiatives and to co-opt their members.<sup>223</sup> These official organizations, however, were slow to adapt to changes and were often outpaced by public opinion, which inhibited them from gaining significant legitimacy and increasing their public appeal.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>220</sup> Alekseeva, *Nyeformaly*, 50.

<sup>221</sup> Kuznetsov, "The Independent Peace Movement in the USSR," 62.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>224</sup> Alekseeva, *Nyeformaly*, 11.

## F. THE LABOR MOVEMENT

Since the 1930s trade unions in the Soviet Union were primarily concerned with keeping the working population quiet through the provision of welfare services, such as the allocation of housing and the administration of the state social security system. Instead of being separated on the basis of occupation, trade unions under the leadership of the CPSU were supposed to represent the interests of the whole working class; thus all workers within a particular branch of production, regardless of their professions and including the management, were members of the same union.<sup>225</sup> This arrangement was meant to reinforce the notion that under Communism the workers and the management shared the same interests, but in reality it ensured the dominance of the latter.<sup>226</sup> Autonomous collective actions of workers (especially following the brutal massacre of striking workers at Novochoerkassk in 1962 during the height of the Khrushchev regime's policies of de-Stalinization) were rare and usually ended up in victimizing those involved.<sup>227</sup> During the Brezhnev era workers were effectively kept quiet by establishing a paternalistic worker-management relationship, where workers, in exchange for tolerating miserable working conditions and the management's violations, were awarded job security and relatively high wages.<sup>228</sup>

The first independent workers' organizations emerged in the wake of Gorbachev's policies of economic restructuring (*perestroika*) and the increasing economic decline, and were deliberately stimulated by the party leadership in order to mobilize grassroots support for the economic reforms undertaken. The development of the autonomous workers' movement accelerated in the period preceding the legislative elections in the spring of 1989 when, within the CPSU both the reformers (through local elections), and the conservatives (with the help of the newly established United Workers Front (OFT)),

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<sup>225</sup> Simon Clarke, "Trade Unions, Industrial Relations and Politics in Russia," in *Parties, Trade Unions, and Society in East-Central Europe*, ed. Michael Waller and M. R Myant (Frank Cass, 1994), 134.

<sup>226</sup> Sue Davis, "Russian Trade Unions: Where Are They in the Former Workers' State?," in Evans, Henry, and Sundstrom, *Russian Civil Society*, 199.

<sup>227</sup> Clarke, "Trade Unions, Industrial Relations and Politics in Russia," 135.

<sup>228</sup> David Mandel, *Perestroika and the Soviet People: Rebirth of the Labour Movement* (Montréal; New York: Black Rose Books, 1991), 80.

vied for support among the working classes.<sup>229</sup> The OFT included both white- and blue-collar workers and strongly opposed private property and co-operatives, which lent it some credibility among workers despite its ties to CPSU officials.<sup>230</sup>

The grassroots workers' movement arguably received its biggest boost from the nationwide strike of coal miners in July 1989, protesting economic mismanagement, corruption and a decline in living conditions. Spreading out from the Kuzbass region in southwestern Siberia, the strike in which over 400,000 miners took part proved that by engaging in collective action workers could win significant concessions. Moreover, the protests marked the first time that workers set up strike committees in order to present the authorities with economic, ecological and, to a lesser degree, political demands; such demands included improving wages, benefits and working conditions, reducing managerial personnel and prohibiting the establishment of new, exploiting cooperatives.<sup>231</sup> The autonomy of enterprise became a central demand for the miners only at later stages of the strike and was put on the agenda most likely because Gorbachev recognized that it represented a powerful means to direct workers' anger at local authorities and the Ministry of Coal Industry, which were seen as hindering the economic reforms of *perestroika*.<sup>232</sup> Having conceded to most of the miners' demands within two weeks, the regime dissuaded workers from other branches of production from engaging in similar protests. Government representatives, for example, immediately engaged in direct negotiations with the railroad workers, who threatened to strike in August that same year and were told that, unlike the miners,' their protests would not be tolerated.<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> Clarke, "Trade Unions, Industrial Relations and Politics in Russia," 136.

<sup>230</sup> Steven Fish, "The Emergence of Independent Associations and the Transformation of Russian Political Society," in *The Soviet System: From Crisis to Collapse*, ed. Alexander Dallin and Gail Warshofsky Lapidus (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 150.

<sup>231</sup> Mandel, *Perestroika and the Soviet People*, 58.

<sup>232</sup> *Ibid.*, 59–61.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

Nevertheless, the miners' strike spread the seeds of an emerging grassroots labor movement. Following the agreement with the government, the strike committees were not disbanded immediately in order to supervise that the regime would not renege on its promises. Later, these strike committees were converted to workers' committees at the city and the regional level.<sup>234</sup> The following year saw the gradual politicization of miner's demands, including calls for the resignation of the Union government and new elections to the seats in the USSR Supreme Soviets. However, these demands yielded little results and ultimately, growing out of the workers' committees in October 1990, the Independent Miners' Union (NPG) was established in order to facilitate worker empowerment.<sup>235</sup> The NPG, despite having a membership of only 50,000 and thus representing only a small fraction of the overall number of miners, was less bureaucratized and more democratic than the official trade unions.<sup>236</sup>

Another area where Gorbachev's economic reforms promoted grassroots activism was with cooperatives. Cooperatives were mostly small enterprises providing consumer goods and services or engaging in construction. They were essentially isolated from the system of central planning and CPSU-control, which implied financial independence. By 1988 the cooperative movement had gained enough momentum to form associations representing the interests and defending the rights of cooperatives. The political and financial independence of these associations was granted by the Law on Cooperation adopted in June 1988.<sup>237</sup> The process of creating associations in self-defense, such as the Interregional Cooperative Federation, the RSFSR Union of Cooperatives or the USSR Union of Cooperatives, was accelerated over the course of 1988 and 1989, when several state agencies engaged in efforts to circumscribe the activities of cooperatives often by

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<sup>234</sup> Clarke, "Trade Unions, Industrial Relations and Politics in Russia," 138.

<sup>235</sup> Mandel, *Perestroika and the Soviet People*, 161.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>237</sup> Darell Slider, "The First Independent Soviet Interest Groups: Unions and Associations of Cooperatives," in Sedaitis and Jim Butterfield, *Perestroika from Below*, 146–147.

disregarding the provisions of the new law.<sup>238</sup> Nevertheless, fearing state encroachment and the loss of autonomy, many cooperatives opted to stay away from those associations and thus their membership was far from universal.<sup>239</sup>

The first truly comprehensive national association of cooperatives was formed in July 1989 under the name Union of Associated Cooperatives (SOK). While it was created with the blessing of the government, fears of state interference were quickly dispelled when a leadership consisting of radical activists was elected. As a result of SOK's growing popularity, aided by the establishment of its weekly newspaper *Kommersant*, representatives of the government soon engaged in talks with the organization's leaders over issues such as new tax regulations and an amendment to the law on cooperatives. SOK's role in policy-making was eventually formalized in July 1990, when it was granted a permanent presence in several governmental bodies. In order to further increase their legislative influence SOK leaders established links with workers' strike committees following the coal miners' strike in 1989.<sup>240</sup> In a move, which was denounced by the government as a means of taking advantage of the striking workers, cooperatives supported strike committees financially or in some cases hired strikers fired from their jobs.<sup>241</sup> Nevertheless, the incompatibility of interests, with the cooperative movement unambiguously endorsing the radical economic reforms and the workers strongly opposing the accompanying disassembly of the social welfare system, soon led to the break-up of the tenuous alliance between cooperatives and workers.<sup>242</sup>

While the NPG and the workers' committees had close links with the emerging democratic movement, they regarded the semi-autonomous Association of Socialist Trade Unions (Sotsprof) which was formed in July 1989 with the support of the official trade union federation, the All-Union Central Council of Trade Unions (VTsSPS), with

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<sup>238</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*, 154–155.

<sup>242</sup> Andrew Arato, "Social Movements and Civil Society in the Soviet Union," in Sedaitis and Butterfield, *Perestroika from Below*, 205.

great suspicion.<sup>243</sup> Sotsprof provided legal defense and social benefits for its members; however, it also charged a membership fee that was three times as high as that of the official union.<sup>244</sup> Moreover, Sotsprof was stricken with internal conflicts over the question of internal democracy versus less radical structures and material benefits, which was exacerbated by the fact that workers joining it did not need to give up their membership in the official trade union. Thus, through 1990 it failed to recruit a significant membership (in 1990 Sotsprof claimed a membership of 15,000 workers).<sup>245</sup>

The VTsSPS, on the other hand, whose membership included virtually all Soviet working people, was a giant bureaucratic organization devoid of any semblance of internal democracy, and thus it lacked legitimacy among workers.<sup>246</sup> As it retained exclusive control over the distribution of social benefits, few workers decided to leave the organization in order to join new independent trade unions out of fear of losing those benefits.<sup>247</sup> Nevertheless, the VTsSPS's monopoly on trade union power soon vanished. As it supported the conservative wing of the CPSU at a time when the reformers took the lead under Gorbachev, the VTsSPS lost the backing of the authorities, and with it the privileges and material resources it was entitled to, and in October 1990 it was replaced by the General Confederation of Trade Unions (VKP). The VKP itself, however, lost its remaining legitimacy among the workers when following the 1991 miners' strikes its leadership signed a no-strike agreement with the government. In the ensuing period the majority of union bodies split off from the VKP, rendering the organization largely irrelevant.<sup>248</sup>

By late 1990 regional branch unions, such as the Federation of Independent Trade Unions of Russia (FNPR), were emerging in an attempt by enterprises, concerns and associations to achieve greater independence from the CPSU-controlled official trade

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<sup>243</sup> Clarke, "Trade Unions, Industrial Relations and Politics in Russia," 138.

<sup>244</sup> Davis, "Russian Civil Society," 200.

<sup>245</sup> Judith B Sedaitis, "Worker Activism: Politics at the Grass Roots," in Sedaitis and Butterfield, *Perestroika from Below*, 22.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 16–17.

<sup>247</sup> Davis, "Russian Civil Society," 201.

<sup>248</sup> Clarke, "Trade Unions, Industrial Relations and Politics in Russia," 146.

unions.<sup>249</sup> The FNPR, opposing the VKP, soon found a partner in Boris Yeltsin, who strived to undermine the power of the Gorbachev-led CPSU and establish republican sovereignty. When Gorbachev, backed by the VKP, denounced and threatened to suppress the miners' strike in 1991 the FNPR raised the prospect of a general strike and later supported Yeltsin in the Russian presidential elections in June 1991.<sup>250</sup>

In 1991, a miners' strike erupted that was tacitly encouraged by Yeltsin. Almost from the start, it was highly politicized, demanding the resignation of Gorbachev, the Union government and the Supreme Soviet of the Soviet Union, the highest legislative body in the USSR. It also differed from the earlier strike in that, following Gorbachev's conservative turn in the fall of 1990, and a nationwide price hike the next spring, it was the first large-scale strike involving workers from outside the mining sectors.<sup>251</sup> While miners from all over the Soviet Union could easily cooperate with each other in 1989, by the beginning of 1991, as a result of the growing sovereignty of the various constituting republics, unified workers' action became increasingly more difficult. This became most evident in the different nature and targets of miner's demands; while the miners of the Donbass region predominantly struck for economic concessions addressing the Ukrainian government, the Kuzbass strike in Russia directed its political demands largely against the Union government.<sup>252</sup> Moreover, contrary to 1989, the strikers did not receive wages this time, which threatened a premature end to the protests. CSOs, such as the NPG, set up solidarity funds and collected food and aid to support the miners in need.<sup>253</sup>

The alliance of the working classes and other liberal forces, however, proved fragile. When concerns over regime repression of the strikers emerged and word broke that Yeltsin and Gorbachev had secretly reached a deal about a new constitution that increased the sovereignty of union republics followed by their elections to the Soviet parliament and the presidency, most workers, apart from the miners, suspended their

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<sup>249</sup> Ibid.

<sup>250</sup> Ibid.

<sup>251</sup> Mandel, *Perestroika and the Soviet People*, 156.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 182–183.

strikes. Feeling betrayed by Yeltsin and the other working sectors, the miners, having at least gained significant economic concessions, finally decided to end their strike on May 10, 1991.<sup>254</sup>

Following the disillusionment of the grassroots labor movement under Yeltsin, soon the FNPR and the other official unions also became opposed to the government's neo-liberal program of shock-therapy. The ensuing loss of government support, on which the official trade unions depended for authority and prosperity, coupled with the lack of credibility amongst their membership, should have contributed to the strengthening of the independent workers' movement.<sup>255</sup> The fact that this did not happen can be attributed to several factors. Autonomous labor organization outside the coal-mining regions, especially within the enterprises, remained weak and sparse in the period of transition between 1989 and 1991, as the administrations continued to keep workers quiet by conceding to some of their demands, but repressing individual activists at the same time.<sup>256</sup> Moreover, the development of a grassroots workers' movement was hampered by the anti-strike law passed following the miners' strikes in the summer of 1989 and the growing reliance of workers on food distributed by the enterprise administration through the official trade unions.<sup>257</sup> Finally, although the independent labor movement indeed gained in strength between 1989 and 1991, this development was promoted primarily from above through political patronage rather than being a result of genuine grassroots initiatives within the working class. As a result of this, Yeltsin was able to easily put the labor movement in the service of his own interests.

After the newly elected President reasserted his power following the repulsion of the August 1991 coup attempt by hard-liners of the CPSU, Yeltsin incorporated members of the independent labor movement, such as the leaders of the miners' committees and of Sotsprof, in his government. In doing so Yeltsin effectively co-opted the leadership of those grassroots workers' organizations, who subsequently refrained from mobilizing

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>255</sup> Clarke, "Trade Unions, Industrial Relations and Politics in Russia," 147–148.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid., 137.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid., 141–142.

their memberships in the defense of labor rights for fear of losing their newly acquired power. Consequently, the independent labor movement soon took on a role similar to that of the official trade unions.<sup>258</sup> Moreover, Yeltsin allowed the official trade unions, which he still feared because of their considerable organizational structure, to retain their former privileges, effectively relegating them as well into a position of dependence. Thus, while encouraging both independent and official unions to continue competing against each other, Yeltsin effectively stunted the labor movement by the end of 1991.<sup>259</sup>

## **G. CONCLUSION**

Despite enjoying the political opportunities necessary for its reemergence in the wake of Gorbachev's reform policies, civil society in the RSFSR was not able to play a meaningful role in the period leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The following analysis provides arguments for the "weakness" of Russian civil society.

Participation in associational life and collective action in the RSFSR was virtually non-existent in the period preceding Gorbachev's coming to power, which was largely a consequence of the high barrier of fear within the population. Although the level of repression compared to other countries in Eastern Europe was not significantly higher in the RSFSR during the Cold War period, the memories of the millions falling prey to the terrors of Stalinism discouraged most people from publicly voicing dissent. Moreover, the totalitarian nature of the Soviet state, infiltrating every aspect of social life with the support of the KGB's extensive network of informants, enabled the regime to become aware of embryonic forms of independent collective action and nip emerging dissent in the bud. This also allowed the regime to cut back indiscriminate repression against "suspicious" segments of the society after 1956 and instead target individual "troublemakers." Furthermore, the vast geographic area of the Soviet Union, with the RSFSR in its center, coupled with its underdeveloped infrastructure and lines of communication, made it difficult for people to stay in touch and engage in collective action across several regions. This also increased people's propensity for quiescence as it

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<sup>258</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>259</sup> Ibid.

was common for targets of regime repression to simply “disappear” without the public or Western human rights groups, for that matter, ever gaining knowledge of it.

Participation remained stunted even in the wake of Gorbachev’s reform policies and the gradual breaking down of the barrier of fear. While in terms of sheer numbers the RSFSR saw a remarkable upsurge of CSOs, it lacked a mass-based social movement which could have acted as a negotiating partner engaging the regime in constructive talks. The reasons for this are manifold. Probably most importantly, the emergence of widespread participation—and cooperation for that matter—was hindered by the absence of a shared national or ideological identity among activists. The republican fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the lack of an external occupying force prevented CSOs from rallying under the banner of nationalism, while the regime’s promotion of an overarching proletariat class mentality, most notable in the case of the all-encompassing branch trade unions, hindered the emergence of an ideological “us vs. them” scenario. Notable exceptions for significant participation promoted by a collective identity were the miners’ strikes and the environmental movement. In the case of the miners, the common dangers and hardships endured beneath the earth led to the emergence of a collective identity based on solidarity among the workers, while the environmental movement united people mainly on the basis of the common good and its apolitical nature.

Other social movements, such as the human rights and the peace movement, simply lacked the popular appeal to attract mass memberships, which was a result of a combination of repression, isolation and the predominantly intellectual character of those grassroots initiatives. In the case of the human rights movement this was further aggravated by the narrowness and apolitical nature of its concerns which did not offer a political alternative to the existing Communist regime.<sup>260</sup>

Participation in the labor movement, apart from the occasional miners’ strikes, was characterized largely by apathy, despite the political opportunities provided by Gorbachev’s reform policies. First, paternalistic worker-management relationships within labor unions, and later, at the time of the emerging independent labor movement, the

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<sup>260</sup> Nicolai N Petro, *The Rebirth of Russian Democracy: An Interpretation of Political Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995), 132.

resource monopoly of the official trade unions, prevented workers from engaging in collective action or joining autonomous organizations out of fear of losing their jobs or having their social benefits cut. This also explains why memberships of the newly emerging independent trade unions, such as the NPG and Sotsprof, remained relatively low compared to that of the official trade unions, despite the latter having low levels of legitimacy and not representing effectively workers' interests. Moreover, in the period of transition the workers' movement became a playground for rivalries between the reformists and the conservatives within the CPSU, and later for the power struggle between Gorbachev and Yeltsin, as the opposing sides vied for support among the workers only to demobilize them after their political interests had been met. Thus, being a football for the political elite and lacking genuine grassroots worker initiatives, Yeltsin, emerging victorious from the fight against the Communists, had an easy time co-opting the labor movement, effectively terminating the opportunities for autonomous collective action.

Finally, the official associations, such as Komsomol, VOOP, or the VTsSPS, did not promote the active participation of the masses. Although they included almost all people from a particular segment of society, often boasting memberships of tens of millions, the rigid bureaucratic structure of these large organizations and their tight supervision by the regime did not allow for the emergence of any semblance of autonomous collective action; instead they were largely created to provide control over the society and serve the interests of the political elite. Apart from participating in state-sponsored activities and taking advantage of the social benefits provided by them, the memberships of the official associations remained largely passive, and as soon as the monopoly of the CPSU was abolished and the diminishing resources lessened the appeal of these organizations, they were disbanded or rendered irrelevant during the period of transition.

Russian civil society was seriously lacking in terms of empowerment. CSOs were only able to influence decision-makers when they managed to rally sufficient popular support around their goals and only when those goals aligned with the interests of the CPSU and its efforts of increasing its own legitimacy. Thus, lacking both mass-based

popular support and government responsiveness, the human rights and peace movements suffered from weak empowerment. Apart from largely symbolic concessions, such as being allowed to take part in official conferences, the most they achieved under Gorbachev's rule was to make the regime aware of the need to create state-owned interpretations of the issues they addressed. As a result, they prompted the establishment of state-controlled human rights, disarmament and other organizations. The environmental movement, on the other hand, as a result of the wide-spread social support, the large number of initiatives, its apolitical nature and, most importantly, the regime's benevolence, was fairly successful in influencing state decisions. As a consequence of the decline in living conditions in the early 1990s, however, the movement lost its popular appeal when economic concerns began to trump environmental issues. Finally, the labor movement was able to wrest significant economic concessions from the state, largely as a result of the miners' propensity for protest action, but its political demands were mostly left unanswered and the few that were fulfilled, such as enterprise autonomy, were largely imposed on it by members of the political elite trying to use the working class for their own purposes. Later, the co-optation of trade unions under Yeltsin deprived the labor movement of its remaining influence. In terms of empowerment the notable exception was the cooperative movement which acquired a permanent advisory position within the government and thus was able to shape state policies. Being isolated from the rest of civil society and seeking to fulfill its narrowly defined interests, the cooperative movement, however, did not promote the overall empowerment of Russian CSOs.

As a result of harsh repression and fear of regime infiltration the RSFSR was virtually devoid of independent CSOs until the mid-1980s. The only exceptions were small dissident groups of intellectuals, mostly engaged in the area of human rights and usually forced to dissolve following repression against its membership, and unofficial environmental movements formed on an ad hoc basis. Hindering the emergence of an embryonic form of civil society, the RSFSR was suffering from the absence of large-scale, integrative societal institutions providing at least some public space for autonomous collective action. As a result of its dependence and weakness the Russian Orthodox Church was not able to fulfill this role up until the late 1980s, when Gorbachev

engaged in improving church-state relations, leading to the slow restoration of religious autonomy and the adoption of a new laws ensuring freedom of conscience in 1990.<sup>261</sup> As such, the Orthodox Church was not able to act as a safe haven for alternative thought during the periods of greatest repression, and even though following Gorbachev's introduction of *perestroika* and *glasnost* it regained its autonomy, by then the overall slackening of state repression allowed for the emergence of alternative forms of independent societal life.

While independent associational life indeed thrived in the second half of the 1980s, most of these newly emerging autonomous associations, such as environmental and peace groups, were small, fragmented and were soon rendered irrelevant by the political and economic realities unfolding in the final years of the Soviet Union. Probably even more remarkably, in its final year, the RSFSR lacked a truly autonomous labor movement. Although in the wake of Gorbachev's reform policies a number of independent workers' initiatives emerged, they never acquired the organizational strength and, most importantly, the societal support necessary to ward off efforts of co-optation by the political elite.

Russian CSOs also suffered from weak cross-cutting cleavages. Initially this might seem to be counterintuitive, given the Communist regime's efforts to instill an overarching proletariat class mentality into society and thus rally people of different class and origin in huge mass-organizations. Even so, after over half a century the regime was not able to overcome the deep-seated mistrust dividing workers and the intelligentsia. The working class maintained deep contempt for the intelligentsia, which they regarded as being responsible for all the social grievances they had to endure, such as repression, disempowerment and fragmentation.<sup>262</sup> On the other hand, although this view was somewhat challenged by the discipline and organization the miners showed during their strike in July 1989, most of the intelligentsia regarded the workers as brutish, uneducated

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<sup>261</sup> John L. H. Keep, *Last of the Empires: A History of the Soviet Union, 1945–1991* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 349.

<sup>262</sup> Clarke, "Trade Unions, Industrial Relations and Politics in Russia," 137.

and receptive to populist and nationalist ideas.<sup>263</sup> As a result of this attitude workers did not mingle with intellectuals, which contributed to the weak cross-cutting cleavages of CSOs within the RSFSR.

The lack of mixing and cooperation between laborers and intellectuals also had profound effects on the prospects of democratization in Russia. The emerging democratic movement in the second half of the 1980s was dominated by the middle-aged intelligentsia concentrated in the big cities, while peasants, workers, women and the youth were largely left out.<sup>264</sup> This isolated the democrats from large parts of the society and deprived them of the support from the masses of militant workers, which decreased their legitimacy in talks with regime representatives. On the other hand, the lack of intellectuals within the labor movement meant that members of the political elite were easily able to manipulate the demands of the workers, who lacked proficiency in articulating political claims.

Severely limiting the role it was able to play during the period of transition, Russian civil society had to reconstitute itself practically from scratch in the late 1980s as the totalitarianism of the Stalinist period virtually erased all memories of its embryonic beginnings in the 1920s. Moreover, even the relative decline of repression during and following Khrushchev's "thaw" did not promote the emergence of political opportunity "holdovers," which CSOs could have resorted to in the wake of Gorbachev's reform policies. One reason for this was the absence of an integrative societal institution able to harbor the seeds of civil society during the periods of greatest oppression. The other reason was that the human rights CSOs emerging in the late 1960s, as well as the environmental CSOs, apart from being too weak and too isolated, fearing state infiltration and thus suffering from a lack of trust, did not establish strong organizational structures.

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<sup>263</sup> Mandel, *Perestroika and the Soviet People*, 65.

<sup>264</sup> Anders Uhlin, *Post-Soviet Civil Society: Democratization in Russia and the Baltic States* (London; New York: Routledge, 2006), 47.

Lacking these structures, the autonomous forms of collective action quickly disappeared in the face of repression, leaving no opportunity “holdovers” for the emerging CSOs under Gorbachev.<sup>265</sup>

Finally, Russian civil society severely lacked civility and its underlying principles, making it unable to significantly promote efforts of democratization. As a result of the totalitarian nature of the regime that attempted to control every aspect of social life, the fear of repression was deeply ingrained within the populace and hindered the emergence of trust within and among CSOs. Tolerance was weak among CSOs as the gradual retreat of the regime from public space in the late 1980s allowed for the emergence of uncivil groups publicly embracing chauvinism and anti-Semitism, such as *Pamyat* (Memory), a group which focused on defending Russian culture from Zionist “infiltrators.”<sup>266</sup> Apart from a few initiatives of human rights groups in the 1970s to provide relief to victims of repression and the support of some cooperatives to striking workers in the late 1980s, reciprocity was largely absent in civil society. Most notably, outside the coal mining regions solidarity did not take root within the labor movement, which was evident in the absence of an inter-factory strike structure among enterprises from different branches of production and the indifference of appeased workers towards the victimization of striking colleagues. Lastly, and most importantly, the divergence of interests and deep-seated mistrust hindered the emergence of cooperation among the various civil societal forces, such as between workers and the intelligentsia, or the cooperatives and the workers. Moreover, the political elite’s divide-and-rule strategy even thwarted cooperation *within* the working class, with both the independent and the official labor unions fighting over the scarce resources and for the favor of power-holders.

At the time of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russian civil society was severely lacking the traits of a good civil society. While Gorbachev’s economic and political reforms provided the necessary political opportunities, considering that civil society had to reconstitute itself virtually from scratch, the short period preceding the

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<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>266</sup> Kuznetsov, “The Independent Peace Movement in the USSR,” 54.

political turmoil of 1991 allowed only for the emergence of an embryonic civil society, which was not capable of pushing the political elite towards greater democratization. In the ensuing period the solidification of the political establishment around Yeltsin's presidential rule deprived civil society of the political opportunities for further development, contributing to the weakness of grass-roots pressure on the political elite in present-day Russia.

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## **V. TUNISIA: A CIVIL SOCIETY RIPE FOR DEMOCRACY?**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

When protests broke out in December 2010 in Tunisia following the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, not many analysts believed that in less than a month's time Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, the country's long-standing iron-fisted ruler, would be gone. After all, Tunisia was regarded even by Middle Eastern standards as an extremely repressive country, where the state's practices of infiltrating the private sphere of its citizens rivaled that of the Communist totalitarian regimes in Eastern Europe. On the other hand, the fact that—compared to most other Middle Eastern nations—Tunisia has a rather homogenous population in terms of ethnic and religious composition. It is also relatively rent-poor with a military that is small in size and has been kept largely under civilian control, and it has a comparatively large, educated middle class, which has always made it a more likely candidate for democratization. The regime's repressive policies, however, coupled with its artful co-optation of potential opposition groups, ensured that it maintained thorough control over the populace, and hindered the emergence of a vibrant civil society.

Drawing from the criteria developed in Table 1 of Chapter 2, Tunisia's civil society will be evaluated. This chapter argues that as soon as widespread protests removed the barrier of fear in Tunisia, the slackening of state repression opened up public spaces previously unavailable to societal forces. Prior to 2011, Tunisian civil society had in fact developed characteristics that were inherent to a good civil society, including wide participation, a general sense of tolerance and cooperation, as well as memories of the struggle for autonomy. Following the overthrow of the Ben Ali regime, these factors have helped Tunisia to embark on the long and arduous road of democratization.

The chapter begins by first looking at the labor movement and claims that despite the repressive policies of the state and its lack of internal democracy, the labor union under the Bourguiba regime, was able to exert considerable influence on state policies. The chapter then investigates the rise and fall of Islamism in Tunisia and finds that, due

to its elitist nature and its inability to provide social services, al-Nahda (the main Islamist movement) did not manage to increase its public base of support. What follows is an analysis of the Tunisian Human Rights League and its struggle to instill tolerance in society. The chapter then asserts that despite the Ben Ali regime's increasing repression and co-optation of civil society organizations and the ensuing growing intolerance in society and decrease in associational activity, civil society forces were nevertheless able to mobilize and cooperate on a number of issues. The chapter concludes by claiming that cooperation and tolerance have played an important role in bringing down the Ben Ali regime and promoting democratization in Tunisia.

## **B. THE STRUGGLE BETWEEN THE STATE AND THE LABOR MOVEMENT**

Following independence from France in 1956, in the early years of the regime of Habib Bourguiba, Tunisia embarked on a project of liberalization by rewriting the constitution, expanding access to public education and adopting a legal code that protected the rights of women, workers and private property. This process of liberalization, however, did not spread to the area of associations. A law adopted in 1959 obligated all associations to obtain a permit from the Ministry of Interior which had wide discretion in granting or denying authorization.<sup>267</sup> In addition, associations had to fit into a given set of categories in order to be eligible for registration, and as human rights and democracy groups were not a permissible category, they were often denied registration by the state.<sup>268</sup> To make state control complete, most associations were funded by the government and their leadership was comprised of members from Bourguiba's Neo-Destour party.<sup>269</sup>

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<sup>267</sup> "Arab Spring: An Opportunity for Greater Freedom of Association and Assembly in Tunisia and Egypt?," *Global Trends in NGO Law* 3, no. 1 (2011): 3, <http://www.icnl.org/research/trends/trends3-1.html>.

<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> Eva Bellin, "Civil Society in Formation: Tunisia," in *Civil Society in the Middle East*, ed. Augustus R. Norton (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1994), 128.

Moreover, the state, in an effort to exert greater control over the various autonomous groups and movements within society, moved to incorporate them into highly institutionalized unionist structures which could be influenced more easily. The largest and most important of these unions was the Tunisian General Labor Union (UGTT), the national confederation of labor unions.

The UGTT played a major role during the struggle for independence from France, and after having gained independence, it became one of the two main pillars of the new state, next to Bourguiba's Neo-Destour Party. These two organizations tried to reconcile and channel the different views emerging in society.<sup>270</sup> Links between the two pillars were deep-seated as UGTT leaders were often appointed to government ministries. This practice, however, was not a selfless act on part of the regime but rather a product of pragmatic political considerations. For example, when Ahmed Ben Salah, the UGTT's influential secretary general between 1954 and 1956 was appointed as minister of economy, the Bourguiba regime's ulterior motive was to weaken the labor union's leadership and rein in the unruly movement.<sup>271</sup>

Ben Salah's socialist vision of a planned development required for the state to control all social forces, including the UGTT.<sup>272</sup> In line with this vision a more compliant leadership was installed at the top of the UGTT, which resulted in a drop in membership levels and a period of inactivity for the duration of the Ben Salah era until 1969.<sup>273</sup> In the following decades, the UGTT maintained a peculiar relationship with the regime, alternating between co-optation and staunch opposition, the latter being the case especially when government policies threatened to adversely affect union membership. Moreover, even though the regime managed to co-opt the union leadership from time to time, the rank and file was notorious for not heeding the call of their co-opted leaders,

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<sup>270</sup> James L Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings: What Everyone Needs to Know* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 55.

<sup>271</sup> Delphine Cavallo, "Trade Unions in Tunisia," in *Political Participation in the Middle East*, ed. Ellen Lust-Okar and Saloua Zerhouni (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2008), 241.

<sup>272</sup> Eva Bellin, "Civil Society Emergent: State and Social Classes in Tunisia" (PhD diss., Princeton University, 1992), 277.

<sup>273</sup> *Ibid.*

particularly in cases when decisions were made at the membership's expense.<sup>274</sup> For example, despite laws adopted in 1966 and 1976 requiring authorization by the UGTT and ten days' advance warning for strikes, union officials were often forced to grudgingly follow the rank and file's lead in order to preserve their credibility amongst the membership.<sup>275</sup> Increasingly, this led the UGTT leadership to embrace the radical views of the militant activists, and by the mid-1970s the labor union once again became a vibrant organization with a broad popular support.<sup>276</sup>

In trying to keep the radicalizing labor movement in check, Bourguiba—who had renamed the state party the Destourian Socialist Party (PSD) in 1963—was aided by strong economic growth in the 1970s which allowed the regime to buy off dissent in the form of wage increases. At the same time, the strong reliance of the labor union on public funds made it vulnerable to regime intervention in its internal politics.<sup>277</sup> Nevertheless, labor activism rose to unprecedented levels, culminating in the first general strike in the history of post-independent Tunisia at the end of 1977. The following year the worsening financial crisis prompted the UGTT to organize a major demonstration, which ended up being brutally suppressed by the regime. The unruly elements among the UGTT's executives were dismissed and jailed while a more compliant leadership was installed.<sup>278</sup>

The regime crackdown produced a temporary drop in levels of UGTT membership and activity; however, the state, in order to bolster its own legitimacy and popular base, was quick to mend fences with the labor movement by restoring its autonomy.<sup>279</sup> Furthermore, the UGTT succeeded in winning substantial minimum wage increases during the 1970s and, in the early 1980s, was able to significantly impact public

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<sup>274</sup> Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 55.

<sup>275</sup> Bellin, "Civil Society Emergent," 290–291.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*, 299.

<sup>277</sup> David A McMurray and Amanda Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts: Dispatches on Militant Democracy in the Middle East* (Bloomington: Indiana Univ Press, 2013), 35.

<sup>278</sup> Bellin, "Civil Society Emergent," 307.

<sup>279</sup> *Ibid.*, 314, 338.

policies. Thus, despite these instances of state co-optation and repression the labor movement ultimately maintained some degree of independence and influence over the regime.

The ensuing honeymoon between the state and the labor movement, however, did not last long. Due to the increasing economic problems, by the mid-1980s the regime's ability to buy off dissent decreased, and thus, with the state becoming less tolerant, the worker's demands for higher wages were increasingly met with violent crackdowns on the UGTT in 1984 and 1985.<sup>280</sup> After suppressing the protests, the regime once again appointed a new, subservient executive committee in order to weaken the UGTT's autonomy.<sup>281</sup>

In addition to state interference and co-optation, the UGTT also suffered from a lack of internal democracy. This was especially prevalent under the leadership of Habib Achour during the 1970s, when union elections were regularly rigged and conducted by acclamation rather than by secret ballot to ensure a disproportionate representation of the Secretary General's supporters. Similarly, dissenting local UGTT branches were outvoted by creating a multitude of new, loyal UGTT locals.<sup>282</sup> Furthermore, the top-down nature of funding within the organization did not enhance internal democracy. Direct payments from the state ensured the financial power of the executive committee at the expense of the rank and file as local unions had to solicit funds from the center, depriving them of the ability to withhold membership fees as a means to influence the leadership.<sup>283</sup>

Nevertheless, despite the lack of internal democracy and the political corruption of the leadership, union dissidents did not seek to create rival labor unions because of the bureaucratic barriers created by the state and due to fears that the regime might use a strategy of divide and conquer to further limit the autonomy of the labor movement.<sup>284</sup>

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<sup>280</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 35.

<sup>281</sup> Lise Garon, *Dangerous Alliances: Civil Society, the Media and Democratic Transition in North Africa* (London; New York: Zed Books, 2003), 28.

<sup>282</sup> Bellin, "Civil Society Emergent," 292.

<sup>283</sup> *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>284</sup> Cavallo, "Trade Unions in Tunisia," 246.

Concerns over such regime machinations were well grounded as Bourguiba, in order to reinforce state control of the unruly UGTT in the mid-1980s, discreetly supported dissenting breakaway unions (such as the National Union of Tunisian Workers in 1984) to undermine the position of the union leadership, and then reunited the labor movement under leaders who were known to be supportive of the regime.<sup>285</sup>

Despite all these problems, there were also signs of change in terms of the responsiveness of the leadership to the base. Beginning from the 1980s, a new generation of leaders had come to power, such as Taieb Baccouche between 1981–1984 and Ismail Sahbani between 1989 and 2000. They did not have first-hand experience of the independence struggle from France, nor did they maintain close ties to the central party.<sup>286</sup> Instead, these new leaders were exposed to the radical student movements, the struggle of the rank and file, or the harshness of Tunisian prison cells, which increased their credibility amongst the base and helped them to maintain some distance to the regime.<sup>287</sup>

Besides the labor movement, another important societal force in the anti-colonial struggle in Tunisia was the women's movement. Similar to labor unions, following independence, the various women's groups were soon brought under state control by incorporating them into the National Union of Tunisian Women, founded in 1958. The National Union lacked any autonomy, which became evident when Bourguiba married its first honorary president, Wassila Ben Ammar, in 1962. The remaining independent women's organizations, which had close ties to the Communist party, were outlawed and disbanded following the adoption of the law on civil associations in 1959.<sup>288</sup>

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<sup>285</sup> Christopher Alexander, "Authoritarianism and Civil Society in Tunisia," in *The Arab Revolts: Dispatches on Militant Democracy in the Middle East*, ed. David A McMurray and Amanda Ufheil-Somers (Bloomington: Indiana Univ Press, 2013), 35.

<sup>286</sup> Bellin, "Civil Society Emergent," 401.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid.

<sup>288</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 25.

### C. THE RISE AND FALL OF ISLAMISM

In Tunisia the early expressions of Islamism in the 1970s were particularly concerned with social decay of the youth, which was most prominently demonstrated by the casual dressing habits of women, the mixing of sexes and the presence of numerous coffee shops.<sup>289</sup> During the 1970s Islamism gained traction mainly on university campuses and thus was largely supported by young, urban, middle-class students and teachers.<sup>290</sup> The government initially regarded the Islamist movement, especially due to its depoliticized nature, as a counterweight to leftist sympathizers on university campuses and the UGTT.<sup>291</sup> The Islamists seemed to confirm this perception when they condemned the protests organized by the UGTT in 1978 (for which they were heavily criticized by leftist actors), but soon they began to understand the importance of syndicate activism and public agitation in enlarging their social base.<sup>292</sup>

In order to give the Islamist movement a more political character, Rachid Ghannouchi created the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) in 1981, which despite its relatively moderate and elitist nature compared to other Islamist movements and its non-authorization by the regime, soon enjoyed wide popularity.<sup>293</sup> After having gained control of the educational syndicate as a result of their strong backing on university campuses, the Islamists moved to infiltrate the UGTT. Ultimately in the elections to the Union's General Congress in 1984, they managed to elect 70 members out of 220 delegates.<sup>294</sup>

The labor union's repression following the protests of 1984 and 1985 created a vacuum amongst the civil society forces challenging the state, which was soon filled by the MTI. The Islamist's rise in popularity did not go unnoticed by the regime, and as the

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<sup>289</sup> Salwa Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics Culture, the State and Islamism*. (London: I.B. Tauris, 2003), 141.

<sup>290</sup> *Ibid.*, 142.

<sup>291</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*, 144.

<sup>293</sup> Alexis Arieff, "Political Transition in Tunisia," in *Tunisia and Egypt: Unrest and Revolution*, ed. Justin C De Leon and Charlotte R Jones (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2012), 22.

<sup>294</sup> Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics Culture, the State and Islamism.*, 144.

MTI's clandestine organization offered few opportunities for regime infiltration, Bourguiba soon began to fear it even more than the labor movement.<sup>295</sup> When the MTI escalated its demonstrations in 1986 and 1987, Bourguiba at last became intent on destroying the organization and imprisoned most of its leaders. Bourguiba's relentless campaign against the movement, however, ultimately led to his downfall when his Prime Minister, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali, deposed him in a bloodless coup in November 1987. Ben Ali's coup is credited with staving off threatening social unrest and the potential execution of non-violent Muslim activists.<sup>296</sup>

What followed was a brief period of liberal reforms (during which the Socialist Destourian Party was renamed Democratic Constitutional Rally (RCD)), which fueled Islamist hopes for political emancipation. In order to comply with a new party code that prohibited the creation of political parties on religious grounds, the MTI renamed itself Hizb al-Nahda (The Renaissance Party) in early 1989 to prove its pro-democratic nature, but even so it was denied participation in the national elections that same year. Nevertheless members of al-Nahda ran successfully as independents in the elections. It was at that time that Ben Ali became convinced that the Islamist movement could not be controlled and therefore had to be eliminated.<sup>297</sup> The civil war in neighboring Algeria in the early 1990s provided the Ben Ali regime with ample reason to silence political opposition under the pretext of religious extremism and the threat of terrorism. When a 1991 arson attack against an RCD office in the capital was blamed on al-Nahda, the regime used the attack to justify a full-blown crackdown on the Islamist movement.<sup>298</sup>

Al-Nahda's defeat was mostly attributed to the fact that it refused to cooperate with other movements within civil society, particularly the workers and the lower middle classes, and thus, it was not able to enlarge its base of support outside university campuses.<sup>299</sup> Moreover, another factor leading to al-Nahda's relatively limited public

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<sup>295</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 35.

<sup>296</sup> Bellin, "Civil Society in Formation: Tunisia," 133.

<sup>297</sup> Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 57.

<sup>298</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 29.

<sup>299</sup> Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics Culture, the State and Islamism.*, 144.

support, especially compared to that of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, was the Ben Ali regime's successful reduction of poverty throughout the 1990s. It also created a monopoly on service provision and helped set up 6,000 neighborhood committees to improve living conditions across the country; this effort denied Islamists a foothold through charities.<sup>300</sup> The regime also banned associations suspected of Islamic origin. All of these actions left very little room for independent Islamist service-providing NGOs, thus denying Al-Nahda access to significant parts of society.<sup>301</sup>

#### **D. THE TUNISIAN HUMAN RIGHTS LEAGUE**

It was not until the late 1970s that another important actor of Tunisian civil society emerged. In 1977, after a split in the ruling party, the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) was created with the inclusion of dissenters from the PSD and other opposition parties which were banned from forming political parties.<sup>302</sup> The LTDH became the first human rights group in the Arab world. By 1985 the LTDH found itself in an ideological crisis over the presence of Serges Adda, a Tunisian Jew, on its executive committee and the potential role of the organization in promoting the rights of women.<sup>303</sup> After a heated series of debates with Arab nationalists and Islamists who rejected the Western concept of human rights, a compromise, called the Tunisian Human Rights Charter, was adopted that allowed Adda to keep his position and created the Women's Affairs Committee. In exchange future applicants were required to sign the Charter and commit themselves to the objectives of the organization.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> Myriam Blin, "Structural Reform and the Political Economy of Poverty Reduction in Tunisia: What Role for Civil Society?," in *Economic Liberalisation, Social Capital and Islamic Welfare Provision*, ed. Jane Harrigan and Hamed El-Said (Basingstoke [England]; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 165.

<sup>301</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

<sup>302</sup> Garon, *Dangerous alliances*, 25–26.

<sup>303</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>304</sup> *Ibid.*

During the early years of the Ben Ali regime, women's influence increased when Ben Ali allowed two women's groups to join the LTDH in August 1989. This was a novelty because until then the ruling party had a monopoly on the issue of women.<sup>305</sup> The consensus within the LTDH's leadership, however, soon ended when Moncef Marzouki, the new president, was attacked over his condemnation of the regime's harsh crackdown on Islamists and Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait.<sup>306</sup> When the LTDH renewed its condemnation of human rights violations committed against imprisoned Islamists in late 1991, the regime set out to muzzle the organization.<sup>307</sup>

In 1992, the Ben Ali regime introduced amendments on the Law on Associations, which required that any association carrying out "general" activities (such as the LTDH) to admit any person that adhered to the organization's principles and decisions, while it also prohibited individuals from the governing bodies of political parties to become directors or to assume responsibilities in the steering committees of those associations.<sup>308</sup> These amendments stripped the LTDH of its independence by allowing the regime to flood the League with pro-government members and to dissolve its steering committee, which at that time included several senior members of various political parties.<sup>309</sup> Rather than comply with the terms of the amendment the LTDH opted to dissolve itself, but ultimately resumed its activities in 1994 after being reclassified by the regime as a non-general association.<sup>310</sup>

Thus, the LTDH, despite being harassed by the regime and other non-liberal forces in society, was able to voice concerns over human rights abuses, including those committed against Islamists, and convey a sense of tolerance to other actors in civil society.

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>306</sup> Ibid.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>308</sup> Eric Goldstein, *Tunisia's Repressive Laws: The Reform Agenda* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2011), 33.

<sup>309</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>310</sup> Ibid.

## E. THE END OF TUNISIAN CIVIL SOCIETY?

By the late 1980s, Tunisia was widely viewed as having the potential for civil society, due to its political reforms, Western-oriented elite and progressive social policies.<sup>311</sup> Moreover, civil society seemed to thrive, as the number of registered NGOs in Tunisia increased from 1,886 in 1988 to 5,186 in 1991, as a result of the Ben Ali regime's political and economic reforms in the late 1980.<sup>312</sup> While a great variety of associations emerged, engaging citizens in collective problem solving, this large number was elusive. It also included associations that existed mainly on paper.<sup>313</sup> Nevertheless, a host of associations such as social centers and regional development associations brought together citizens from various social classes with diverse worldviews, and thus promoted the presence of cross-cutting cleavages. Other organizations advocated tolerance and legalism, such as the LTDH and the Association of Tunisian Lawyers. Therefore the regime's relatively liberal policies, though short-lived, contributed to the emergence of some aspects of good civil society.<sup>314</sup>

Despite these positive tendencies, civil society soon lost the limited independence it had gained over the previous decades when it was given the choice to either become co-opted by the state or face dissolution. The National Pact created by the Ben Ali regime in 1988 provided citizens with access to credit and consumer goods in exchange for renouncing civil and political liberties. The UGTT, which had been severely weakened in the mid-1980s, joined the pact without putting up too much resistance, while the left-wing civil institutions—such as the human rights movement and women's organizations—were offered government positions or other incentives in exchange for adhering to this new form of “social contract.”<sup>315</sup> In a surprise move, Ben Ali also managed to get the backing of al-Nahda for his National Pact, despite putting most of the

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<sup>311</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 32.

<sup>312</sup> Michael Edwards, *Civil Society* (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2004), 21.

<sup>313</sup> Bellin, “Civil Society in Formation: Tunisia,” 137.

<sup>314</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>315</sup> Garon, *Dangerous alliances*, 29.

movement's leaders in jail and not promising any specifics in exchange.<sup>316</sup> Thus, by the late 1980s the regime was able to effectively neutralize all civil opposition by offering vague prospects of democratization in exchange for political subservience.

Moreover, in its efforts to extend its control over civil society the regime was aided by the alleged threat of Islamism. Following the crackdown on al-Nahda and other Islamist groups, opposition political parties and the neutralized UGTT closed ranks behind the regime which they preferred to an Islamist takeover.<sup>317</sup> In addition, the regime also moved to co-opt the women's movement by legalizing the independent women's association, promoting their labor rights and adopting laws which safeguarded their rights within the family.<sup>318</sup> Not surprisingly, the women's association did not put up a lot of resistance against the state's attempts, as the latter, promising to safeguard the existing rights, was seen as a lesser evil compared to the Islamists who fervently attacked the Personal Code during the 1989 elections.<sup>319</sup> In doing so, the association exposed itself to harsh attacks from the Tunisian Communist Party, which launched a campaign deploring the Westernization of women (e.g., women's struggle for greater freedom of expression) and their co-optation by the state.<sup>320</sup>

Referring to the threat of militant Islamism, the state infiltrated through its party apparatus the various institutions of civil society and kept track of their activities.<sup>321</sup> Much like in the totalitarian regimes of Eastern Europe, state control was not limited to the public sphere. Through its widespread presence and its network of informers in society, the RCD also intruded into the private life of citizens, subjecting those who dared to voice dissent to various forms of harassment ranging from preventing enrollment at universities to obstructing certain health care services and blocking administrative

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>317</sup> Ismail, *Rethinking Islamist Politics Culture, the State and Islamism.*, 157.

<sup>318</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>319</sup> Laurie A. Brand, "Arab Women and Political Liberalization," in *Democracy and Its Limits Lessons from Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East*, ed. Howard Handelman and Mark A. Tessler (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1999), 256.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 18.

proceedings.<sup>322</sup> As a consequence of this, distrust was widespread in the populace to the degree that “Tunisians became their own censors,” which led to a further decline in associational life.<sup>323</sup>

Furthermore, the neoliberal economic reforms of the 1990s also hindered the development of good civil society in Tunisia. While the number of associations based on traditional patronage and kinship networks increased, especially in rural communities, organizations featuring cross-cutting cleavages declined, as did participation in other CSOs.<sup>324</sup> Instead of undercutting primordial identifications and promoting the emergence of good civil society, market reforms reinforced traditional attachments because the structural adjustment programs mainly benefited large landowners who often had close ties to government officials. Moreover, they did little to improve the lot of the small peasantry, thus leading to huge inequalities.<sup>325</sup> While the poorer farmers had no other choice than to subject themselves to traditional patron-client relations, wealthier farmers reinforced this process by preventing the farmer’s union from meeting, where small-scale farmers could have voiced their disagreement over agricultural policies.<sup>326</sup> In addition, poorer farmers were also kept out of the union by introducing membership requirements, such as having a certain amount of land.<sup>327</sup> Thus, while the neoliberal market reforms adopted by the Ben Ali regime strengthened primordial identifications in rural Tunisia and promoted intolerance in society, they contributed to the poor increasingly viewing formal institutions as defending the interests of the rich; this dynamic led to an overall decline in associational participation over the 1990s.<sup>328</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid.

<sup>323</sup> Ibid.

<sup>324</sup> Stephen J. King, “Neoliberal Reforms and Democratization in Tunisia: Civil Society in a Rural Community,” in *Economic Liberalization, Democratization, and Civil Society in the Developing World*, ed. Remonda Bensabat Kleinberg and Janine A Clark (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 201.

<sup>325</sup> Ibid., 205.

<sup>326</sup> Ibid., 210.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> Ibid., 212.

By the late 1990s Ben Ali became obsessed with the idea that a coalition, headed by former politicians in alliance with al-Nahda, militant portions of the labor and student movements, the LTDH and legal opposition parties might try to overthrow him.<sup>329</sup> In order to prevent this alliance from emerging, Ben Ali introduced an array of repressive policies aimed to hamstringing protest movements and the organization of collective action. By effectively dissolving the ties between elite and popular politics, these measures crippled civil society, which during the preceding decades was able to influence government policies by establishing alliances with government elites and exploiting tensions within the state administration.<sup>330</sup>

In line with its increased repression of civil society, the regime also attempted to discredit human rights activists from the LTDH and the CNLT (the National Council on Liberties in Tunisia, which was created by Marzouki in 1998 after he was ousted from the LTDH). They condemned repression against non-violent Islamists, by charging them with receiving funds from foreign governments and NGOs and committing immoral sexual acts.<sup>331</sup> In addition, the state continued to “colonize” civil society by infiltrating the remaining independent NGOs with party members and thus bringing them completely under government control and influence, and by flooding civil society with a host of proxy CSOs providing needed services but remaining under regime control.<sup>332</sup>

Furthermore, although the country’s law governing labor unions was generally regarded as liberal, with union founders only having to inform the government of their intentions in order to get legal recognition, in practice the regime erected bureaucratic barriers that made it impossible to create independent unions.<sup>333</sup> For example, in 2007, 500 UGTT members at odds with the union’s leadership over their unwillingness to adopt

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<sup>329</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 37.

<sup>330</sup> Ibid.

<sup>331</sup> Emmanuel Sivan, “Illusions of Change,” in *Islam and Democracy in the Middle East*, ed. Larry Jay Diamond and Marc F Plattner (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 20.

<sup>332</sup> Blin, “Structural Reform and the Political Economy of Poverty Reduction in Tunisia: What Role for Civil Society?,” 166.

<sup>333</sup> Rasha Moumneh and Sarah Leah Whitson, *The Price of Independence: Silencing Labor and Student Unions in Tunisia* (New York, NY: Human Rights Watch, 2010), 3, 36.

a more resolute posture vis-à-vis the government, filed an application to create an alternative labor union; the regime simply refused to accept the founding documents.<sup>334</sup> Moreover, even if legal recognition was granted, state interference into the activities of unions was common. For example, the National Syndicate of Tunisian Journalists (NSTJ), founded in 2008 to replace the heavily co-opted Association of Tunisian Journalists and the only legally recognized union outside the UGTT, had its independent board replaced with one loyal to the regime. This occurred when the original board spoke up against the harsh treatment of journalists and the policies of restricting the freedom of press.<sup>335</sup> In addition, the government also stopped the NSTJ's public funding, forcing the newly founded union to rely on membership fees to maintain its operations.<sup>336</sup>

The General Union for Tunisian Students (UGET), which was created in 1953, fared even worse. Although technically an association, due to its political influence and the fact that it was fulfilling union-like functions by protecting the interests of students and advocating on their behalf for better educational circumstances, the UGET was exposed to harsh government repression, including the arrest and torture of its members, leading to a significant decline in its membership.<sup>337</sup> Partly due to internal divisions and partly due to the Ben Ali regime's continued interference in its internal politics, the UGET was not able to hold a congress from 2003 until 2013, thus rendering the organization irrelevant for almost a decade.<sup>338</sup>

Despite being emasculated, Tunisian CSOs occasionally joined forces to protest against the Ben Ali regime's repressive policies and in doing so were sometimes able to score some victories. For example in 2000, Tawfiq Bin Brik, a Tunisian journalist went on a hunger strike to denounce the state harassment that was brought upon him and his family members for criticizing government policies. The LTDH, the CNLT, the Bar Association, the Democratic Women's Association and the Tunisian Association of

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<sup>334</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>335</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>336</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>337</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid., 26.

Young Lawyers coalesced to condemn the regime's repressive measures and to support Bin Brik and his family by issuing a joint press release and also staging hunger strikes.<sup>339</sup> In the end, the regime, fearing bad publicity abroad, dropped all charges against Bin Brik and ceded to most of his demands.<sup>340</sup>

In terms of the most influential actor in Tunisian civil society, the UGTT, in exchange for supporting the Ben Ali regime's political and economic reforms, was granted say in the economic and social decision-making processes in the early 1990s.<sup>341</sup> Again, state-decision making was based on political considerations to curb the autonomy of the labor union. Having received stakes in implementing the economic reforms of the regime, the UGTT had to abandon its calls for higher wages or broader political freedoms. Thus, it was largely relegated to safeguarding existing rights under the Ben Ali regime.<sup>342</sup> The regime's actions to limit the independence of the UGTT, however, did not stop here. In exchange for including the labor union in the formal decision-making process, the regime expanded its influence over the leadership and the structure of the UGTT by appropriating the right to appoint the secretary-general and transferring unruly union directors to public companies, stripping them of their political clout.<sup>343</sup>

Despite becoming more compliant at the leadership level, the UGTT remained far from unified; at the lower levels it tolerated and maintained the expression of alternative views by union dissidents.<sup>344</sup> In addition, even UGTT leaders had to maintain the semblance of internal legitimacy, and thus were often forced to condone the wildcat strikes of regional offices.<sup>345</sup>

Moreover, despite the Ben Ali regime's repression, whenever the UGTT or more often its local unions, voiced dissent and mobilized their membership, other CSOs were

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<sup>339</sup> Larbi Sadiki, "Bin Ali's Tunisia: Democracy by Non-Democratic Means," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 29, no. 1 (2002): 72.

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>341</sup> Cavallo, "Trade Unions in Tunisia," 242.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid.*, 244.

quick to join the protests and demonstrations. For example, in 2002 the local UGTT union in Moknine initiated a strike without the central bureau's authorization in order to force the owners of a textile factory to honor previous commitments. When the strike proved fruitless, outside actors, such as RAID-ATTAC Tunisia, a non-legalized anti-economic liberalization organization, and the LTDH stepped in to provide support for the protesters by ensuring international media coverage and providing updated information.<sup>346</sup>

In 2005, the slow resurgence of the labor movement became evident when the UGTT, for the first time since 1984, openly rejected a decision made by the president. This occurred when Ben Ali personally invited Ariel Sharon to the UN World Summit in Tunis.<sup>347</sup> The ensuing strikes and protests, which UGTT regional offices and trade unions organized, were ultimately put down by the police. Even more significant, in 2008, the UGTT organized workers who were enraged over unfair hiring practices and widespread corruption in government circles to stage a strike in the mining region of Gafsa; the strike lasted six months before the military managed to break it up. These events showed that the UGTT, having the means to effectively mobilize against regime policies, was still the most important CSO daring to publicly voice dissent. Despite the regime's efforts to subjugate the labor movement, the UGTT remained the major countervailing force to the state during the Ben Ali era, which was also reflected in the union's culture highlighting the importance of "activism," "independence," and "internal democracy."<sup>348</sup>

## **F. THE REEMERGENCE OF CIVIL SOCIETY**

The protests that erupted after the death of Mohamed Bouazizi in December 2010 were referred to by many analysts as social movements targeting economic misery and widespread corruption, which lacking leadership from formal opposition forces, would not be able to sustain themselves over a longer period of time.<sup>349</sup> The resilience of

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<sup>346</sup> Ibid., 252.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid., 248.

<sup>348</sup> Ibid., 250.

<sup>349</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 19.

Tunisian civil society, however, proved them wrong. The unemployed graduates who started the demonstrations were soon joined by citizens from all strata of society, such as students, doctors, lawyers, professors and shopkeepers, turning the initial protests into massive movements of civil disobedience.<sup>350</sup> In addition, the protests were backed by student movements, human rights activists and the local union groups acting independently from the central UGTT bureau. Labor union activists proved invaluable in organizing the unemployed and disenfranchised youth into a mass movement, while professional associations, such as those of lawyers and doctors, were the first to articulate political demands.<sup>351</sup> These different CSOs cooperated through newly founded local councils, which helped to organize the demonstrations, and thus provided the institutional structure to maintain the momentum of the uprising.<sup>352</sup>

The final nail in the Ben Ali coffin was delivered when, following the escalation of violence and the protests, the rank and file of the UGTT were able to pressure the union leadership to break with the regime, support the uprising and call for a general strike on January 14. On that day Ben Ali fled the country.

Most analysts agree that the reason why the social pact maintained for over two decades dissolved so rapidly was the regime's inability—due to its insatiable greed—to provide the middle class with access to an adequate standard of living in exchange for its acquiescence.<sup>353</sup> It is also important, however, to acknowledge the importance that cooperation and the inherent sense of tolerance amongst the various forces of civil society played in bringing the uprising to a successful end. From January 14, when Ben Ali fled the country, to March 3, when the interim government announced elections for a Constituent Assembly, a grassroots coalition of labor unions, lawyers associations, leftist movements, human right organizations and Islamists from al-Nahda continued with the

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<sup>350</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>351</sup> Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 56.

<sup>352</sup> Teije Hidde Donker, "Tunisia: Surprise, Change and Continuity. Relating Actors, Structures and Mobilization Opportunities Around the 14 January 2011 Revolution," 2013, 25, <http://hdl.handle.net/1814/26185>.

<sup>353</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 20.

protests in order to prevent the *ancient régime* from returning to power.<sup>354</sup> Without the perseverance of this makeshift coalition, the success of the uprising would have been most likely provisional in nature. Moreover, this overarching sense of cooperation was carried over to the elections of the Constitutional Assembly on October 23, 2011, when al-Nahda, having won 37 per cent of the popular vote, created a coalition with the left-wing nationalist party of the Congress for the Republic and the social democratic party of Ettakatol.

## G. CONCLUSION

Most observers were taken by surprise when, after weeks of widespread protests, Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was forced to leave Tunisia on January 14, 2011. After all, protests had happened before in Tunisia, but the state was always able to overcome them through co-optation, minor concessions or outright repression. The demonstrations that erupted after the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi, however, were different from previous ones in that they were supported by a wide-ranging coalition of civil society groups that managed to sustain the protest movement by turning grievances into political demands and thus address and mobilize large parts of the populace. This process was unforeseen by many analysts as civil society under the Ben Ali regime was widely regarded as being heavily repressed and bereft of its autonomy. This chapter, however, argues that over the decades of struggle against the regime (and sometimes within itself) Tunisian civil society has developed certain characteristics of good civil society that have made it more suitable to bring about political change compared to civil societies in other parts of the Arab world.

From a structural point of view, Tunisian civil society differs significantly from other Arab civil societies leading up to the Arab Spring. What is most striking is the influential role the labor union plays not just within civil society, but also in interactions with the state. At times repressed, interfered or co-opted by the state, the widespread support the UGTT enjoys within society nevertheless ensures that it remains an

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<sup>354</sup> Graham Usher, "That Other Tunisia," in *The Arab Spring*, ed. Paul McCaffrey (Ipswich, Mass.: H.W. Wilson, 2012), 46.

influential player whose position, demands and mobilizing capabilities have to be taken into account. Less influential, but still an important actor, the LTDH and later other human rights organizations, have ensured that by voicing concerns over human rights abuses legality and tolerance remain on the agenda. The third important actor within civil society, al-Nahda, differs markedly from other Islamist movements in the Middle East in that it has remained more elitist and moderate due to its restricted access to the Tunisian populace. On the one hand, the regime's repressive policies banned the creation of all associations of religious origin, which deprived al-Nahda of the capability to interact with society under the banner of Islam. On the other hand, the regime's monopoly on social services has meant that Tunisian civil society has never developed a large service-providing sector through which al-Nahda could address the needs of the people. Finally, it is worth noting that as a consequence of the regime's heavy-handed repressive policies Tunisia has been virtually devoid of any effective social movement through which society could engage in meaningful collective action outside the formal institutions of CSOs.<sup>355</sup>

For most of its history, Tunisian civil society was in a constant state of struggle with the regime over its independence. At times, civil society was granted greater public space, e.g., during the liberal policies of the Bourguiba regime in the first half of the 1970s and early 1980s, or the early years of the Ben Ali regime in the late 1980s, which it used to grow in strength, and reassert its autonomy. At other times, the increasing repression, the severity of legal constraints, the regime's strategy to infiltrate CSOs with members of the state party to manipulate board elections or replace executive committees completely, as well as the financial control the regime exerted over associations deprived civil society of most of its autonomy. The regime nevertheless refrained from completely subjugating civil society because of its need to retain a sufficiently vigorous civil society that acted as a counterweight to the Islamist threat and, at the same time, bolstered the regime's own legitimacy. In addition, CSOs, like the LTDH, were able to bolster enough international pressure to deter the regime from dissolving them.<sup>356</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> McMurray and Ufheil-Somers, *The Arab Revolts*, 45.

<sup>356</sup> Goldstein, *Tunisia's Repressive Laws*, 34.

Moreover, even if Tunisian civil society was relegated to a semi-autonomous status and depended on the benign nature of the state, the mere fact that it was often engaged with the regime in a tug of war over membership and leadership issues meant that civil society did not settle for passivity despite the obvious risks of repression. The UGTT in particular, especially during the 1970s and early 1980s, enjoyed a relative independence which taught its membership the merits of autonomous collective action. Furthermore, these periods of expanded political opportunities allowed for the emergence of an organizational infrastructure, which survived the introduction of more repressive policies and provided members with memories of a more liberal environment of collective mobilization. Later, these political opportunity “holdovers” served as a mobilizing resource which strengthened civil society’s perseverance in the face of the regime’s repressive actions during the Arab Spring.

Participation in associational life has usually depended on the level of repression exerted by the regime and the degree of confidence that collective action has a meaningful impact. While after the regime’s brutal crackdown on dissenters or the installation of a more compliant leadership participation in CSOs usually decreased, state concessions have often led to an increase in associational activity (and also militancy, which was best represented by the rising vigorousness of the labor movement in the 1970s and early 1980s following successive wage increases). During the 1990s and 2000s, rising inequalities and liberal economic policies implemented by the regime reduced popular confidence in the capability of CSOs to promote meaningful change, and passivity prevailed in civil society. This passivity, however, did not affect the UGTT, which through its local branches engaged in several protests in the in the 2000s, and which boasted an impressive 600,000 members and 15,000 unions nationwide at the eve of the protests in December 2010.<sup>357</sup> Moreover, the collective action within the labor union also contributed to the political socialization of its members, who through strikes and demonstrations learned the limits of political participation and the cost of repression.<sup>358</sup> Thus, most observers viewed Tunisian civil society as passive, and these

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<sup>357</sup> Moumneh and Whitson, *The Price of Independence*, 7.

<sup>358</sup> Cavallo, “Trade Unions in Tunisia,” 250.

observers were therefore surprised by the outbreak of protests in December 2010. In fact, labor union activism and participation rose steadily over the preceding decade.

In terms of empowerment, Tunisian civil society, despite the harsh repression by the regime, still managed to have an impact on state policies. Out of all CSOs, naturally, the labor union was the most successful in extorting concessions from the state, mostly in the form of wage increases during the 1970s and early 1980s. Later, during the early years of the Ben Ali regime, the UGTT received a formal role in the decision-making process as part of Ben Ali's National Pact; however, in doing so, the labor union also relinquished much of its power to influence state policies. Other actors in civil society were only able to influence state policies when they confronted the regime with a wide-ranging coalition and/or when their demands were backed up by substantial international pressure, as in the case of the journalist's hunger strike in 2000.

Nevertheless, as these cases demonstrate, the regime responded to some of the effectively presented demands made by civil society. These concessions reasserted CSOs in times of increased repression and taught them important lessons in articulating demands and effectively employing collective action. These skills were later put to test not just during the demonstrations of the Arab Spring, but also after the uprising, when for the first time in Tunisian history, CSOs actively engaged with government representatives in law-making. These negotiations resulted in a new, more liberal Law on Associations being adopted in September 2011.<sup>359</sup>

Thus, as presented, Tunisian civil society possessed some characteristics of a good civil society, but what about cross-cutting cleavages and civility, which introduce crucial values required for democratization? Following the structural adjustment programs of the 1990s, CSOs, especially in rural communities, became advocates for the interests of the wealthier strata. This led to a drop in the numbers of poorer members who became increasingly disenfranchised by those CSOs. This "elitization" of parts of civil society led to a decline in cross-cutting cleavages. While this might seem to have adversely affected civil society, the fact that the UGTT and its nationwide network of

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<sup>359</sup> *Local Empowerment, Global Impact*, Annual Report (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, 2011), 8, [www.icnl.org](http://www.icnl.org).

local branches incorporated people with a wide range of views and beliefs from all over the country implied that it was able to partially offset the negative consequences of the decline of cross-cutting cleavages elsewhere.

Even more important, civility, and especially tolerance and cooperation, while naturally not embraced by the whole civil society, were nevertheless present in the practices of several CSOs and helped to overcome the general lack of trust, which permeated society due to the heavy repression of the Ben Ali regime. The emergence of tolerance was promoted by the Bourguiba regime's liberal policies, which after gaining independence from France adopted laws protecting the rights of women, workers and minorities. Within civil society, the UGTT, while often lacking democratic practices in its internal politics, tolerated a vast array of different sentiments advocated by its membership. This allowed it to become a forum for oppositional views in a country, where dissent was otherwise heavily repressed. Since the late 1970s, the LTDH and later other human rights organizations advocated legality and tolerance even toward those who at other times charged human rights organizations with serving Western interests or adhering to non-Islamic values. Finally, and probably most significantly, the fact that al-Nahda was barred access to notable parts of the society implied that it had fewer opportunities to engage in populist practices, and thus, it retained a more moderate and tolerant character. This tolerance implied greater acceptance of opposing views, even if those views were articulated by secular forces, which prepared the ground for cooperation with other parts of civil society. This was the final and presumably most important point in analyzing Tunisian civil society's capabilities for democratization.

The decades-old struggle with the regime over public space taught Tunisian CSOs the lesson that cooperation is the basis for having an impact on the state's public policies. The more Tunisian CSOs were able to align behind a common goal, the greater was the likelihood that the regime, even if not conceding to their demands, would at least consider the issue at hand. This form of coalition-building was evident in the case of the journalist's hunger strike. Due to the peculiar structure of Tunisian civil society, CSOs also learned that obtaining the support of the UGTT with its vast membership and resources of mobilization would drastically increase the chances for success. Thus, CSOs,

like in the case of the 2002 Moknine protests, increasingly became aware of the benefits of joining the UGTT during its demonstrations.

Ultimately, this predisposition for cooperation among the various forces within Tunisian civil society would prove to be crucial in the protests leading to the ouster of Ben Ali and his regime. Moreover, this ability of Tunisian civil society forces to cooperate with each other, regardless of embracing secular or Islamic values, opened up the door for the country's first, truly democratic elections in October, 2011.

This conclusion by no means implies that the goodness of Tunisian civil society was sufficient or even necessary to bring down the regime. Neither does it imply that Tunisian civil society in its entirety possesses the characteristics of a good civil society. As recent events have shown, militant Islamism advocating intolerance and violence is on the rise, and to cope with it is one of the most pressing issues of the current political leadership. Nevertheless, the presence of a (partly) good civil society greatly enhances the prospects for democratization in the North African country. After all, Tunisia has successfully crossed the threshold of becoming an electoral democracy in 2011, which according to common belief would not have been possible without the favorable contributions of a vigorous civil society. Whether Tunisian civil society is strong enough to support the further democratization of the country remains to be seen. The fact that after nearly two years the achievements of the Tunisian revolution are still in place, however, warrants some cautious optimism.

## **VI. EGYPT: A CIVIL SOCIETY DERAILED?**

### **A. INTRODUCTION**

Most analysts were surprised by the vehemence of the protests that broke out on January 25, 2011, in Cairo, and elsewhere in Egypt, and ultimately led to the overthrow of one of the longest standing rulers in the Arab world in less than three weeks. After all, Egypt is one of the key countries in the region and after having defeated the threat of Islamism by the late 1990s, the regime backed by the military seemed to be stronger than ever. A closer look, however, shows that the protests which erupted in 2011 were not unprecedented. Since the mid-2000s the increasing levels of collective action had prepared the ground for the uprising. Moreover, the Islamists, far from being defeated, moved from challenging the state directly to overthrowing the regime by transforming society from the bottom up. Thus, when secularists and Islamists were able to put aside their differences in the beginning of 2011, the resulting coalition (of course largely aided by a neutral military) easily swept away Mubarak. Contrary to Tunisia, however, this makeshift coalition soon disbanded after the removal of Mubarak, opening up the door for an Islamist takeover.

Drawing from the criteria established in Table 1 and the discussion in Chapter 2, Egypt's civil society will be evaluated. This chapter argues that the predominantly bad nature of Egyptian civil society promotes the emergence of the uncivil Islamist regime and dims the prospects of democratization in the near future, despite the presence of countervailing forces within civil society. The chapter first analyzes the political opportunities regime policies provided civil society since the Free Officers coup in 1952 and finds that, despite the liberalizing policies of the 1970s and 1980s, civil society was not able to take advantage of these opportunities because of the multi-front war it fought against regime repression, Islamist incursion and internal factionalism. The chapter then investigates the various civil society forces and finds that the majority of Egyptian CSOs sport attributes of bad civil society. The chapter concludes by claiming the acceptance and tolerance which brought down the Mubarak regime did not take hold within a civil

society dominated by uncivil values in the transitional period that followed, leading to the rise of the Islamist regime around Mohamed Morsi and the ensuing increase in repression.

## **B. THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN EGYPT**

Egypt has a long history of the traditional organizations and voluntary associations constituting civil society. While CSOs flourished in the Kingdom of Egypt between 1922 and 1952, under the Nasser regime many associations were closed, forced underground or incorporated into regime organizations.<sup>360</sup> The vibrant civil society, which espoused a multitude of divergent views, was regarded not just by the regime but also large parts of the intelligentsia, as a threat to the unifying aims of the regime.<sup>361</sup> In 1964 the regime adopted Law 32, which tied the registration of any association to Ministry of Social Affairs (MOSA) approval, required associations to inform the MOSA about their activities, and placed significant limits on fundraising, allowing only membership fees and offerings during religious services to be collected without prior MOSA permission.

Law 32 divided associations into two groups: welfare organizations, which had to conduct at least one specific activity, but were not restricted geographically; and development organizations (also called community development associations—CDAs), which could carry out any number of activities previously approved by the state, but were essentially restricted to one locality.<sup>362</sup> Despite the severe constraints, most Islamic voluntary associations and business associations were able to function as they were largely able to self-fund through mosque collections and membership dues.

Following Nasser, Egypt under Sadat embarked on a process of economic and political liberalization. Sadat knew that the main threat to his regime and his policies of reconciliation with Israel came from leftist, Nasserist groups and Islamic fundamentalists.

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<sup>360</sup> Maha M. Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed: The Politics of NGOs in Egypt* (London; New York: Tauris Academic, 2004), 207.

<sup>361</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

<sup>362</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

In order to counterbalance these groups and to address the mounting Islamic sentiments in society, he encouraged moderate Islamist factions, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, to play a more active role.<sup>363</sup> This policy adjustment was most evident in the growing number of Islamic NGOs registered with the MOSA, whose percentage of the total number of registered NGOs increased from 17 percent in the 1960s to 31 percent in the 1970s.<sup>364</sup> Sadat's measures, however, proved ineffective to stem the growing number of critics of his policies of economic and political liberalization, which led to a decline in living standards for the poor and growing inequalities. Ultimately, when he moved to arrest dissenters from all over the political landscape and civil society, including members of political parties, professional syndicates and various Islamist groups, he was assassinated by a militant Islamist activist in 1981.<sup>365</sup>

What followed was a brutal crackdown on Islamist groups by the new President, Hosni Mubarak, during which over four thousand members of the Muslim Brotherhood were arrested. Mubarak, however, soon continued the policies of his predecessor when he attempted to encourage the secular opposition and the moderate Islamists, including the Brotherhood, to form a counterweight against the extremist Islamists.<sup>366</sup> As a result of the regime's policies, the 1980s and the early 1990s witnessed a growing polarization between secular and Islamist forces, which furthered intolerance and repression within civil society itself, leading to an overall decline in civility.<sup>367</sup>

The process of liberalization initiated under Sadat and maintained during the first decade of the Mubarak regime provided civil society actors, such as NGOs, with greater autonomy on the condition that their activities retained an apolitical character.<sup>368</sup> This, combined with the neoliberal economic policies of the regime, resulted in two opposing trends within civil society: while it led to the strengthening of the NGO sector and the

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>364</sup> Ibid.

<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>367</sup> Ibid., 109.

<sup>368</sup> Ibid., 98.

business groups (e.g., by the 1990s the number of NGOs alone reached approximately 28,000),<sup>369</sup> it weakened grassroots and mass-based organizations, which contrary to the former, lacked the necessary financial and organizational background to take advantage of the new possibilities.<sup>370</sup>

The increased role of NGOs in delivering services the state was unable or unwilling to provide (like providing cheap healthcare services), however, did not come with a similar increase in terms of empowerment: the NGOs had no right to organize their constituencies or influence the state policies governing the services they delivered; that is, they lacked any public advocacy mandate.<sup>371</sup>

In the early 1990s, the growing Islamist threat prompted the regime to give up its liberal approach and adopt more repressive policies vis-à-vis the civil society. The previous policy of distinguishing between the Muslim Brotherhood and militant Islamists was abandoned, and the regime introduced laws subjecting the various Islamist groups to harsh repression.<sup>372</sup> Using the threat of Islamism to justify its actions, the government also clamped down on the professional associations, such as the engineers and lawyers associations, which had a large percentage of Muslim Brotherhood leadership, and on the trade unions, which were hitherto the bases of oppositional activity within civil society.<sup>373</sup>

After having won board elections in a number of professional associations, in September 1992, the Muslim Brotherhood also succeeded in winning the majority of board seats in the Bar Association elections. The Bar Association was long regarded as a bastion of liberalism; thus, the Brotherhood's success signaled the growing number of younger Islamist-oriented professionals, who regarded the Brotherhood as the only

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<sup>369</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>370</sup> Rabab Rabab El-Mahdi, *Empowered Participation Or Political Manipulation? State, Civil Society and Social Funds in Egypt and Bolivia* (Boston: Brill, 2011), 64.

<sup>371</sup> El-Mahdi, *Empowered Participation Or Political Manipulation?*, 65.

<sup>372</sup> Bruce K Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 86.

<sup>373</sup> Vickie Langohr, "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics? Egypt and Other Liberalizing Arab Regimes," in *Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Regimes and Resistance*, ed. Marsha Pripstein Posusney and Michele Penner Angrist (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 200.

credible opposition. This was, however, only one side of the story. The Brotherhood's success was also facilitated by the indifference of many professionals about voting in association elections, the infighting between leftist and liberal factions within the associations and the ability of the well-organized, highly motivated Islamist minority to mobilize its supporters.<sup>374</sup>

The regime responded to the Muslim Brotherhood's success in professional association elections by adopting a law in 1993 which required a high turnout in elections in order for them to be deemed valid and also included provisions to put associations under government control should voter participation fall below a certain threshold.<sup>375</sup> The uncivil nature of Egyptian civil society was best represented by the fact that, despite this blatant intervention of the regime in the internal elections of professional syndicates, the law was positively received by the secular forces embracing an anti-Islamist position.<sup>376</sup> While this move made secularists vulnerable to charges of siding with the regime, its underlying causes were to be found in the secular intelligentsia's fear of an Islamist takeover, compared to which the authoritarian practices of the Mubarak regime were seen as a lesser evil.<sup>377</sup>

During the 1990s, the Muslim Brotherhood suffered from a generational dispute between the top leadership and the younger activists in professional associations and on university campuses over the leadership's cautious response to repression, its reluctance to share power and to cooperate with secular civil society groups and its unwillingness to display greater tolerance towards the extension of the rights to women and Copts.<sup>378</sup> The organization also suffered from the fact that wealthy benefactors from the Gulf States provided Islamic activists with alternative sources of revenue, which limited dependence on financing from the Muslim Brotherhood and enabled Islamists with varying views and objectives to work under the umbrella of the Brotherhood without having to follow the

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<sup>374</sup> John L. Esposito, John L. Burgat, François., *Modernizing Islam : Religion in the Public Sphere in the Middle East and Europe* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003), 84.

<sup>375</sup> Langohr, "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics?" 200.

<sup>376</sup> Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed*, 115.

<sup>377</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>378</sup> Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak*, 89.

call of the leadership.<sup>379</sup> This dilution of membership interests, coupled with the organization's vague goals, limited the willingness of other CSOs to cooperate with the Muslim Brotherhood, restricting the latter's reach and influence.<sup>380</sup> Finally, the regime's policies also weakened the Brotherhood's grassroots network of social service and religious organizations. The laws governing NGOs enabled the state to oversee the activities, leadership elections and funding of the service providing organizations, while a law introduced in 1996 placed the Brotherhood's private mosques under similar restrictions.<sup>381</sup> Thus, by the end of the 1990s, all these external and internal constraints severely weakened the Muslim Brotherhood. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood retained its mobilizing capabilities, as a result of which in the 2005 Parliamentary elections the independents backed by the Brotherhood won about 20 percent of the contested seats.

Following the crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood, the regime also took a confrontational course toward the trade unions, which it crippled by adopting a law under the structural adjustment program that deprived workers most at risk of being terminated from the right to vote. It also significantly eased the reelection of incumbent leaders, who were generally members of the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP).<sup>382</sup>

On the other hand, advocacy groups—like women's, environmental and human rights organizations—were spared from governmental harassment and continued to thrive. These new advocacy organizations began to play the roles that the weak opposition groups were not able to fulfill, like representing the rights and interests of workers and farmers, who were troubled by increasing unemployment rates and the prospects of an unprofitable land reform.<sup>383</sup> In addition, many secular and Islamist activists took advantage of the relative peace these advocacy groups enjoyed and continued their oppositional political agenda under the guise of these groups.<sup>384</sup>

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<sup>379</sup> Ibid., 91.

<sup>380</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>381</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>382</sup> Langohr, "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics?" 201.

<sup>383</sup> Ibid.

<sup>384</sup> Ibid.

These advocacy groups enjoyed their relative freedom until the end of the 1990s, when the regime, without much input from the civil society, introduced Law 153 in 1999, severely limiting the activities of most NGOs. While it retained the MOSA's authority to dissolve NGOs and deny foreign funding, Law 153 was originally intended, by reducing reporting requirements and increasing the freedom to raise money domestically, to lessen restrictions on apolitical social service organizations providing much needed services the government was unable to provide. On the other hand, it was also intended to severely limit the activities of oppositional advocacy organizations by requiring civil companies, such as human right groups, to register as NGOs which would have implied their dissolution on the grounds of conducting "political" activity.<sup>385</sup>

When Law 153 was declared unconstitutional a year later, the government, again without consulting with civil society organizations, introduced Law 84 which remains in effect to date. While it is an improvement over the previous law by narrowly defining the scope of political activities NGOs are forbidden to undertake, it significantly increases the authority of the MOSA over NGOs in terms of foreign funding, registration and dissolution. Under the law NGOs have to report regularly their membership composition and sources of financing to the MOSA which also monitors their activities. The law also places harsh restrictions on the cooperation with international organizations.<sup>386</sup>

Despite having grown in size and strength for the last two decades, the affected advocacy NGOs failed to step up effectively against the plans of the government due to the lack of consultation and coordination within and among the various groups, and the overall low level of trust, which was further exacerbated by the regime's divide and rule strategy: while some groups registered under the new law in hopes of avoiding government persecution, others viewed this as a betrayal of their cause.<sup>387</sup> Moreover, the total dependence of the advocacy NGOs on foreign funding, coupled with their limited

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<sup>385</sup> Ibid., 209.

<sup>386</sup> "Law on Associations and Community Foundations (Law 84 of 2002)," <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/egypt.html>.

<sup>387</sup> Langohr, "Too Much Civil Society, Too Little Politics?" 213.

popular appeal, a consequence of the fact that very few local people have personally invested in their success, made them particularly susceptible to government charges of illegitimacy and serving individual and foreign interests.<sup>388</sup>

Apart from legal constraints, civil society in Egypt was also hampered by a peculiar form of corporatism. Contrary to the classical corporatist formula in which all members of a group receive economic benefits in exchange for political domination, under Sadat and Mubarak the regime adopted a tighter form of corporatism, also known as co-integrationism, where at the expense of the broader membership only the top group leaders were co-opted into the system through special privileges, patronage networks and institutionalized corruption.<sup>389</sup> This has been particularly prevalent in the case of labor unions and business organizations whose leaders were often also members of the ruling NDP party.

Co-integrationism has also been effective in coopting NGO leaders and activists by offering them better positions elsewhere in governmental or semi-governmental organizations, while letting them retain their positions as head of the NGOs. Hafez Abu Seada, director of one of the largest and oldest NGOs in Egypt, the Egyptian Organization for Human Rights, for example, has been appointed to the board of directors of the National Council for Human Rights, a semi-governmental institution.<sup>390</sup> This also shows that beyond the co-optation of NGO leaders, the Mubarak regime was also working to make CSOs deemed dangerous, such as advocacy and human rights groups with a political agenda, seem redundant by creating state-controlled organizations that seemingly fulfilled similar functions.<sup>391</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid.

<sup>389</sup> Ninette S. Fahmy, *The Politics of Egypt: State-Society Relationship* (London; New York, NY: RoutledgeCurzon, 2002), 105.

<sup>390</sup> Nadine H. Abdalla, "Civil Society in Egypt: A Catalyst for Democratization?," *The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law*, [http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol10iss4/special\\_2.htm](http://www.icnl.org/research/journal/vol10iss4/special_2.htm).

<sup>391</sup> Ibid.

### C. THE QUALITY OF CIVIL SOCIETY

According to official estimates, by the end of 2008 there were about 30,000 CSOs in Egypt,<sup>392</sup> and out of those about 16,800 were registered NGOs in 2011.<sup>393</sup> The majority of those NGOs are made up of either religious or development associations.

Around 43 percent of all NGOs are of Islamic origin. Largely independent from the state and Western funding, they are able to sustain themselves through the donor payments of individuals, international Islamic NGOs or the governments of other Muslim countries.<sup>394</sup> As they are considered the most active associations, are well organized and have a wide popular base, during the Mubarak era their activities were closely scrutinized by the state. In order to avoid harassment by the MOSA under Mubarak, many Islamic NGOs registered as CDAs.<sup>395</sup> CDAs adding up to another 25 percent of all NGOs, are heavily dependent on state funding and have leadership often recruited from the state bureaucracy.<sup>396</sup>

Islamist associations controlled by the Muslim Brotherhood have a particularly strong appeal among students in universities. This trend dates back to the Sadat era and its liberalizing policies when the Brotherhood was able to win control of all student associations within the universities by offering a variety of services to students, such as providing cheap copies of expensive textbooks or giving financial aid to students in need.<sup>397</sup> These Islamist associations, however, restricted membership and services to those who adhered to “certain moral standards;” for example, in student associations

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<sup>392</sup> Hamdy A. Hassan, “Civil Society in Egypt Under the Mubarak Regime,” *Afro Asian Journal of Social Sciences* 2, no. 2.2 (2011), 7.

<sup>393</sup> Laurel E. Miller, *Democratization in the Arab World: Prospects and Lessons From Around the Globe* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2012), 89.

<sup>394</sup> Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed*, 7.

<sup>395</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>396</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>397</sup> Bruce K. Rutherford, *Egypt After Mubarak: Liberalism, Islam, and Democracy in the Arab World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 82.

women could only use the transportation means provided by the Brotherhood when they wore the veil, and students having trouble affording clothing were offered Islamic garments.<sup>398</sup>

Another significant part of Egyptian NGOs consists of advocacy groups—such as human rights, women’s and environmental organizations—which depend largely on foreign funding. The political nature of their activities puts them in constant confrontation with the state; therefore, like Islamic NGOs during the Mubarak era they were often subject to state harassment and persecution.

Business associations in Egypt constitute a small, albeit influential group within civil society. They largely benefited from the economic policies of Sadat and Mubarak, which replaced the public sector and the centrally planned economy of the Nasser period with a return to capitalism and the private sector. They used their contacts inside the government, their knowledge, money, access to the media and support of international partners to pressure the regime to implement a liberal economic program. Their efficiency was further enhanced by the fact that business associations were few and small in membership, and the similarity of their interests enabled a greater degree of cooperation among them compared to other associations.<sup>399</sup> Despite being empowered to influence state policies, business associations did not promote democratization because they were afraid that democratic elections would bring to power the Muslim Brotherhood, whose policies would destabilize the economy by prohibiting banks from paying or receiving interest or by scaring away tourists through its harsh legal system.<sup>400</sup>

Professional associations are probably the most active civil society organizations in Egypt due to their capability to provide union-like benefits to their membership, the higher education and political awareness of their members and their relatively

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<sup>398</sup> Sheri Berman, “Islamism, Revolution, and Civil Society,” *PPS Perspectives on Politics* 1, no. 02 (2003), 261.

<sup>399</sup> Hassan, “Civil Society in Egypt,” 9.

<sup>400</sup> Ibrahim Elbadawi and Samir A Makdisi, *Democracy in the Arab World: Explaining the Deficit* (London; New York; Ottawa: Routledge ; International Development Research Centre, 2011), 269.

independent financial resources.<sup>401</sup> In addition, the fact that they are usually well-linked to their international counterparts and have direct access to the centers of production and service institutions provides them with a certain degree of protection from excessive government repression.<sup>402</sup>

Participation in council elections within professional associations usually does not exceed 10 percent of those who have the right to vote.<sup>403</sup> Apart from a general lack of interest in politics, this reflects also a lack of any sense of belonging and loyalty to the group. In addition, only a low proportion of the membership takes part in association activities and projects, which reflects a low level of commitment (e.g., in 1988 in the Doctors' Syndicate only 22 percent of the membership participated in health care projects).<sup>404</sup> Similarly, the proportion of the beneficiaries from association projects to the total number of members is extremely low, reflecting the limited extent of the services provided by these associations to their members (e.g., in 1989 the beneficiaries from the health care project in the Engineers' Syndicate amounted to only three percent of the total number of members).<sup>405</sup>

Apart from a disenfranchised membership, internal divisions and factionalism weaken professional associations vis-à-vis the state and make them vulnerable to Islamist incursions. Further weakening associations are a lack of common interests among its membership (e.g., differences within the Bar Association between public sector lawyers and private sectors lawyers) and the longevity of leadership (e.g., in the Engineers' Syndicate Osman Ahmad Osman held the syndicate leadership from 1979 until 1991). Moreover, a lack of democracy and the dictatorial style of the leadership (e.g., in the Lawyers' Syndicate the decision to invest the syndicate's pension fund was taken solely by the leader and his entourage without asking the general assembly) are exacerbated by intolerance among the different factions, corruption and reluctance to abide by

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<sup>401</sup> Saad Eddin Ibrahim, "Civil Society and Prospects for Democratization in the Arab World," in *Civil Society in the Middle East. Vol. 1*, ed. Augustus R Norton (Leiden; New York: Brill, 1994), 41.

<sup>402</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

<sup>403</sup> Fahmy, *The Politics of Egypt*, 137.

<sup>404</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>405</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

democratic rules (e.g., falsification of election results).<sup>406</sup> All these characteristics show the failure of these associations to rid themselves of the authoritarian patterns of the regime they attack, leading to the further alienation of its membership.

Moreover, authoritarian practices are not restricted to the professional associations under secular control. Syndicates, where the Muslim Brotherhood took over the leadership, have experienced a similar decline in the degree of fairness in council elections, the rate of leadership circulation or the degree of integrity.<sup>407</sup>

One of the most influential professional associations in Egypt is the Judges' Club. Established in 1939, its stated aim is to ensure the independence of the judiciary from the executive branch.<sup>408</sup> While this independence was never realized under the consecutive authoritarian regimes, the club's ability to provide benefits to its members and make their voices heard, prompted most Egyptian judges and some district attorneys to voluntarily join the organization.<sup>409</sup> By June 2011, the club's membership reached 9,557.<sup>410</sup> Members' participation in collective actions gradually increased over the 2000s. The judges, for example, organized a number of protests and strikes in 2005 and 2010, when they were denied their constitutional right to monitor parliamentary and presidential elections, or in 2006, when judges protested against government intervention in the judicial process.<sup>411</sup> As one of the goals of the club is to present a politically impartial image of judges, the organization has usually refrained from cooperating with other civil society forces, and thus its demonstrations were often easily broken up by the regime.<sup>412</sup> Nevertheless, despite its apparent ineffectiveness, the opposition mounted by the club provided other judicial institutions with favorable conditions for challenging the regime. In the years preceding the Arab Spring, for example, the Supreme Administrative Court

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid., 146–147.

<sup>408</sup> Bakry Mohamed Eljack El Medni, "Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Egypt: Premises and Promises," 2013, 134.

<sup>409</sup> Ibid.

<sup>410</sup> Ibid.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>412</sup> Ibid.

ruled against the regime in several instances regarding minimum wage increases, electoral misconduct or government corruption.<sup>413</sup> This way, the Judges' Club represented a source of opposition to the Mubarak regime, which therefore kept a close eye on the club's actions.

Another important professional syndicate is the Egyptian Journalists' Association. Established in 1941, it has been active in more public debates than any other professional association in Egypt.<sup>414</sup> It has constantly challenged the regime on issues such as the freedom of expression, or the protection of journalists, and has several times supported other CSOs, like the advocacy NGOs during the campaign against Law 153 in 1999 and Kifaya (which will be described later) in its demands for constitutional amendments in 2005.<sup>415</sup> While the Journalists' Association was not able to influence government policies in a meaningful way, the regime nevertheless feared it because of the wide access the association enjoyed to the public.<sup>416</sup> It therefore became the target of regime interference through membership co-optation or manipulation of leadership selection processes.<sup>417</sup>

Among the Egyptian CSOs, the *labor unions* were always the most important in terms of membership and representativeness. The vibrant labor union activism Egypt enjoyed since its independence in 1922, however, was put to an end in 1957, when the Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) was formed, like all trade unions, under the auspices of the state. The ETUF incorporated elected committees representing worker's interests from each of the trade unions. The ineffectiveness of the ETUF, particularly in dealing with the negative consequences of the liberal economic policies implemented by the state during the Sadat era and the first decade of the Mubarak regime, led to widespread discontent among workers which was reflected by the decline in membership levels of labor organizations (according to some estimates from the 13 million workers in

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<sup>413</sup> Ibid., 138.

<sup>414</sup> Ibid.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid., 140.

<sup>416</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid.

Egypt only 3 million had joined labor unions in the early 2000s).<sup>418</sup> Nevertheless, because of its still massive and representative nature, the Mubarak regime employed a wide array of tools, ranging from co-optation to outright repression, to control the ETUF and especially its leadership.<sup>419</sup> While co-integrationism worked at the top level, the regime failed to establish control over all elected committees which, due to their greater accountability towards their constituency, became catalysts of membership mobilization in times when the co-opted leadership was unwilling to act.<sup>420</sup> These individual trade unions organized and held an increasing number of strikes during the 2000s. At times they forced the regime to change its decisions, especially when it came to the privatization of state-owned enterprises.<sup>421</sup>

Moreover, beginning in the mid-2000s, informal groups formed by workers were emerging which, employing illegal forms of protests (e.g., sit-ins, strikes), were deemed to be more effective in voicing grievances, promoting demands and unifying conflicting interests.<sup>422</sup> As a result of the reemerging labor activism, in December 2008 the property tax collectors established the Real Estate Tax Authority, which was the first independent trade union in Egypt for decades.

Sporadic and limited demonstrations were first tolerated by the regime beginning in the early 2000s, such as those in solidarity with the second Palestinian intifada in 2000-2002 or those against the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003.<sup>423</sup> These protests gradually opened up public space, leading to the emergence of several *social movements* in Egypt.

Established in August 2004, Kifaya, the Egyptian Movement for Change, for the first time in Egyptian history dared to directly criticize the president and his family when it waged a campaign against Mubarak's participation in the 2005 presidential

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<sup>418</sup> Fahmy, *The Politics of Egypt*, 162.

<sup>419</sup> El Medni, "Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Egypt," 145.

<sup>420</sup> *Ibid.*, 146.

<sup>421</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

<sup>422</sup> *Ibid.*, 162.

<sup>423</sup> Joel Beinin and Frédéric Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2011), 243.

elections.<sup>424</sup> Despite the campaign's failure, Kifaya's supporters, including activists and members of different political parties, moved to broaden the movement's base of support by embracing basic reform demands such as the suspension of the state of emergency and the end of the regime's monopoly over power.<sup>425</sup> Besides succeeding to organize dozens of demonstrations over the next few years, because of the movement's elitist nature, narrow ideological platform and internal disputes, Kifaya was never able to attract large masses (especially from the youth and working classes), and by 2008 it had lost much of its appeal.<sup>426</sup>

The April 6 Youth Movement emerged out of a Facebook page established to support a national general strike proclaimed for April 6, 2008, by textile workers in Mahalla.<sup>427</sup> While the organizers planned for the participation of more than 70,000 members nationwide, in the end only a few thousand people took to the streets in Cairo and some university campuses.<sup>428</sup> In the ensuing repression the founders of the movement were detained, and since then April 6 has continued to operate as a loose civic movement.<sup>429</sup> While its demonstrations did not attract a large number of people over the next few years, the April 6 movement which included youth from different political parties, movements and organizations still played a crucial role in mobilizing people for the protests that led to the fall of the Mubarak regime by distributing leaflets and raising public awareness.<sup>430</sup>

The April 6 movement was also instrumental in initiating the campaign "We are all Khaled Said," in honor of the twenty-eight-year-old businessman who was dragged from an Internet café in June 2010 by the police and beaten to death for having uploaded

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>425</sup> Emad El-Din Shahin, "The Egyptian Revolution: The Power of Mass Mobilization and the Spirit of Tahrir Square," *The Journal of the Middle East and Africa* 3, no. 1 (2012): 52.

<sup>426</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>427</sup> Beinun and Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 249.

<sup>428</sup> Ibid.

<sup>429</sup> El Medni, "Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Egypt," 151.

<sup>430</sup> Shahin, "The Egyptian Revolution," 56.

an Internet video revealing the corruption of the police.<sup>431</sup> The “We are all Khaled Said” Facebook page had 473,000 members by January 2011, and the collective identity it provided to its followers proved to be essential in mobilizing the masses for the protests on January 25, 2011.<sup>432</sup>

#### **D. THE ROLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY IN BRINGING DOWN THE REGIME**

Contrary to Tunisia, in Egypt (besides the individual labor unions) social movements played a crucial role in bringing down the regime. In fact, the demonstrations on January 25, 2011, were initiated by social movements such as the April 6 Youth Movement and Kifaya.<sup>433</sup> On the other hand, traditional Egyptian CSOs were as much surprised by the vehemence of the anti-regime protests in January 2011 as the regime itself. The Islamic CSOs backed by the Muslim Brotherhood, for example, only joined the demonstrations after it became clear that the balance of power had shifted in favor of the protesters and the leadership of these organizations faced mounting pressure from their own ranks (especially from the younger members) to participate.<sup>434</sup> This, however, did not mean that members of traditional CSOs did not take to the streets, but they participated on an individual basis rather than as representatives of their respective organizations.<sup>435</sup> Indeed, the success of the mobilization was based largely on the fact that it happened outside of formal structures and was therefore largely apolitical and non-ideological. This appealed to the youth who got increasingly disenfranchised from the traditional CSOs that largely reproduced the authoritarian patterns of the regime in their dealings with each other.<sup>436</sup>

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<sup>431</sup> Beinin and Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 243.

<sup>432</sup> El Medni, “Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Egypt,” 153.

<sup>433</sup> Beinin and Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 243.

<sup>434</sup> Francesco Cavatorta, *Arab Spring: The Awakening of Civil Society. A General Overview* (Barcelona: European Institute of the Mediterranean, 2012), 77.

<sup>435</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Another important factor for the success of the revolution was that the youth was able to establish linkages to the revived trade unionism. Beginning from the mid-2000s, the declining living standards, a consequence of the liberalizing economic policies of the regime, prompted workers to protest against worsening pay and corruption. These socioeconomic demands also appealed to the younger activists and students, and during the January/February protests this created an effective alliance between the youth and the workers.<sup>437</sup>

Due to the unwillingness of the ETUF to take part in the demonstrations, most trade unions joined the protesters on an individual basis.<sup>438</sup> On January 30, 2011, some breakaway unions joined by representatives of workers from throughout the country created the Egyptian Independent Trade Union Federation as a counterweight to the ETUF.<sup>439</sup> When on February 8 some unions of this new federation called for a strike demanding the ouster of Mubarak, tens of thousands of workers joined the protests.<sup>440</sup> Workers continued to flock to the protests the following days, and on March 11 Mubarak resigned.

## **E. NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN**

The underdevelopment of good civil society and political organizations implied that after the ouster of the Mubarak regime the only associations to which citizens could turn to express their grievances and get help were mostly the Islamist organizations of the Muslim Brotherhood, which meant that following Mubarak's fall only the Islamists had the infrastructure in place to mobilize supporters effectively.<sup>441</sup> Moreover, understanding the political and social constraints of the environment in which the Muslim Brotherhood was operating, beginning in the mid-1990s the organization's younger leaders engaged in

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<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 80.

<sup>438</sup> El Medni, "Civil Society and Democratic Transformation in Contemporary Egypt," 177.

<sup>439</sup> Beinun and Vairel, *Social Movements, Mobilization, and Contestation in the Middle East and North Africa*, 247.

<sup>440</sup> Ibid.

<sup>441</sup> Sheri Berman, "The Promise of the Arab Spring: In Political Development, no Gain without Pain," *Foreign Affairs*, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/138479/sheri-berman/the-promise-of-the-arab-spring>.

issuing pamphlets on women's rights, Copts and political pluralism, which were intended to show the Brotherhood's shift towards greater tolerance and moderation, thus making cooperation with it seem more appealing for other CSOs.<sup>442</sup> In addition, the Brotherhood created an image which seemingly underlined its pro-democratic nature: it supported the Judges Club's efforts to increase the independence of the judiciary, called for constraints on the executive and the strengthening of the legislative and advocated the development of civil society.<sup>443</sup> The majority of Egyptian society bought into this image of moderate Islamism, and as a consequence of this, the Muslim Brotherhood's Freedom and Justice Party (together with the Salafist al-Nour Party) dominated the parliamentary elections in 2011–2012, while the Muslim Brotherhood's candidate, Mohammed Morsi, won the presidential elections in 2012.

Secular liberal and pro-democracy CSOs, however, soon became disappointed with their new rulers as the shift in power in favor of the Islamists did not lessen repression against civil society in the following period of transition. In some instances it even increased compared to that of the Mubarak era. In December 2011 and January 2012, for example, several pro-democracy NGOs were raided by the Interior Ministry and judiciary officials under the pretext of having received foreign funding. The hypocritical nature of these raids is shown by the fact that there has been little complaint about the largely opaque financial assistance Islamist groups receive from Gulf States.<sup>444</sup>

Furthermore, following the raids the Egyptian Ministry of Social Solidarity and Justice proposed a draft *Law on Associations and Foundations* to replace Egypt's existing Law 84 of 2002, which was almost identical to a draft prepared in March 2010 by a committee composed of members of the now-disbanded NDP and chaired by ex-Prime Minister Abdelaziz Hegazy.<sup>445</sup> This draft law would have imposed harsh restrictions on the registration and operation of Egyptian CSOs, put restrictions on Egyptian CSOs

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<sup>442</sup> Rutherford, *Egypt after Mubarak*, 97–98.

<sup>443</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>444</sup> "Civil Society & Democratization in Egypt."

<sup>445</sup> The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, "Restrictive Draft CSO Law Announced by Egyptian Ministry of Social Justice and Solidarity," <http://www.icnl.org/news/2012/26-Jan.html>.

cooperating with foreign CSOs and receiving foreign funding and grant the Minister of Insurance and Social Affairs and “any other relevant party” wide discretionary powers to dissolve CSOs.<sup>446</sup> Thus, although the new law was meant to replace Law 84, which was widely regarded as repressive, the restrictions in the new proposal were in some areas even stricter than those of the Mubarak regime. The future of this draft proposal, however, remains uncertain since the mounting domestic and international discontent with the Morsi regime culminated on July 3, 2013, when the Islamist president was removed by the military, and the constitution drafted by the Islamists was suspended.

## F. CONCLUSIONS

The protests in January and February 2011 were initiated by the youth and the upper-middle class who were soon joined by people from all classes embracing different views and beliefs in a spirit of tolerance, including the poor and the upper classes, urban and rural residents, peasants, workers and women, as well as Copts and Muslims.<sup>447</sup> The question then has become, how much of this spirit of acceptance and tolerance spread over into the sphere of civil society after the ouster of the Mubarak regime?

In Egypt, the majority of CSOs are made up of either advocacy NGOs or service providing NGOs. Despite their huge numbers and contrary to Western beliefs, these NGOs cannot function as agents of democratization for several reasons. First, advocacy NGOs, such as human rights, women’s and environmental organizations, suffer from a lack of cross-cutting cleavages and autonomy. Trying to master the bureaucratic barriers of domestic and foreign funding, these NGOs have often had to employ educated, foreign speaking personnel which gave them an aura of elitism, alienating the less educated masses. The fact that most of these NGOs reside in Cairo and Giza and have weak connections to rural Egypt does not help either.<sup>448</sup> In addition, as the majority of these NGOs are controlled by the upper class, they usually have no interest in the development

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<sup>446</sup> The International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, “NGO Law Monitor: Egypt,” <http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/egypt.html>.

<sup>447</sup> Shahin, “The Egyptian Revolution,” 48.

<sup>448</sup> Jung, *Democratization and Development*, 44.

and political incorporation of the lower classes.<sup>449</sup> The Egyptian form of co-integrationism, in which the state co-opts the leaders of those NGOs in exchange for economic benefits, plays a significant role in this. Thus, contrary to a civil society contributing to democratization, where citizens join voluntary associations to promote aggregate societal interests, advocacy NGOs often serve the particular interests of educated or elitist groups.<sup>450</sup>

Furthermore, as presented, advocacy NGOs are often the only organizations within Egyptian civil society possessing the necessary skill sets to communicate with Western partners and apply for Western funding. As anti-colonial sentiments still linger within Middle Eastern societies, Western funding often undermines the legitimacy of these NGOs in the eyes of the society; a phenomenon often exploited by regimes to weaken and repress NGOs with foreign connections. Even if these NGOs are allowed to continue their operations, governments make sure that foreign funding goes to social groups that are deemed either insignificant or supportive of the regime.

Second, non-governmental advocacy organizations are usually single-issue groups with small local constituencies and thus are not suited to challenge authoritarian regimes, a task which usually requires a wide popular base. They are also hampered by a weak organizational set-up, the lack of external audits, absence of strict internal rules and regulations and administrative inefficiency.<sup>451</sup> The fact that they largely depend on foreign funding, apart from casting doubt on their legitimacy, creates an additional problem by inciting competition for external donors among those NGOs. Thus, scarcely any communication, much less cooperation exists between advocacy NGOs, which weakens their ability to lead and mobilize effectively.<sup>452</sup> In addition, because of their weak horizontal links, there is no umbrella organization representing all those NGOs vis-à-vis the government, a fact which weakens their ability to influence state policies.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>449</sup> Abdelrahman, *Civil Society Exposed*, 86.

<sup>450</sup> Jung, *Democratization and Development*, 45.

<sup>451</sup> Hassan, "Civil Society in Egypt," 13.

<sup>452</sup> Abdalla, "Civil Society in Egypt."

<sup>453</sup> El-Mahdi, *Empowered Participation Or Political Manipulation?*, 70.

The low civility in terms of trust and cooperation, the absence of cross-cutting cleavages, the lack of empowerment and the low participation of the constituency of the advocacy NGOs, coupled with the successful co-integrationism by the regime, was particularly apparent when the Egyptian government pushed through Law 153 in 1999, and later Law 84.

Then, if advocacy NGOs, for the aforementioned reasons, are not capable to further democratization, can service-providing NGOs fulfill this role? The answer is they cannot, again for several reasons. Due to the state's inability to provide even basic services sometimes, the regime has provided these NGOs with a wide array of political opportunities, as long as their activities remain largely apolitical. Thus, NGOs being primarily responsible for providing services have not attempted to mobilize their beneficiaries for any kind of advocacy activities out of fear of state repression.<sup>454</sup> This has translated into an absence of empowerment, which makes service-providing NGOs incapable to influence state policies. The process is furthermore reinforced by the fact that because of the service providing nature of their activities, the constituencies of these NGOs (despite being large in size) are not incentivized to participate actively.

Moreover, because the large majority of service-providing NGOs have an Islamist background, they would not even consider mobilizing their constituencies for advocacy activities. Instead, unable to topple the state itself, the Islamist movements in Egypt have sought to “achieve their revolutionary goals directly by gradually remaking Egyptian society and culture” in a bottom-up approach through civil society.<sup>455</sup> As the Islamists themselves lack tolerance towards differing views within society, which hinders cooperation with other societal groups, CSOs under Islamist influence, such as social service providing NGOs, suffer from an absence of civility. Furthermore, membership is not free in these associations, as in exchange for the services provided, they require members to adhere to certain Islamic norms and values, which leads to a decline in cross-cutting cleavages.

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<sup>454</sup> Ibid.

<sup>455</sup> “Civil Society & Democratization in Egypt.”

Thus, while having retained a certain degree of autonomy from the state, similar to advocacy NGOs, service-providing NGOs, especially those of Islamic origin, sport several attributes of bad civil society which makes them incapable to promote democratization.

Business associations are among the most powerful CSOs in Egypt when it comes to influencing government policies. Given their common goals of promoting liberal economic policies, cooperation among business associations is widespread, which empowers them vis-à-vis the state. This empowerment, however, does not translate into demands for greater democratization as the main aim of business associations is to seek benefits for their members and the rule of the demos, especially if it is dominated by Islamist values, would most likely harm their particularistic interests. In addition, their elitist nature, small membership, low tolerance towards the lower classes and close ties to the government imply the absence of cross-cutting cleavages, low civility, and—despite their financial independence—a semi-autonomous status. Thus, business associations in Egypt cannot act as agents of a good civil society.

Professional associations in Egypt have a long history and have usually been one of the most active traditional CSOs (next to the labor movement) challenging the regime. Despite the constant source of opposition they present, professional associations have been rather ineffective in influencing state policies. The main reason for this is that while they call for greater democratization, professional associations (secular and Islamist-led alike) themselves display low internal civility in terms of intolerance and low levels of reciprocity, which leads to the alienation of the membership and therefore a decline in participation. Another problem is that despite their relative independence in terms of financing, internal factionalism usually weakens these associations to the point that they are easily co-opted by the regime or taken over by Islamists.

Finally, while differing views within professional associations usually imply the presence of cross-cutting cleavages, this does not further cooperation with other CSOs because of widespread co-optation or intolerance at the leadership level. Thus, professional associations in Egypt, despite their inherent capabilities to further

democratization and promising attempts by some associations (such as by the Judges' Club or the Egyptian Journalists' Association), are nevertheless hampered by the attributes of bad civil society.

Turning to those CSOs that have played a major role in bringing down the Mubarak regime, it is apt to say that while it was largely social movements that initiated the protests by mobilizing people, the labor unions were crucial in sustaining the demonstrations and helping them to reach the tipping point. Both social movements and labor unions were enabled to act as catalysts of change because they exhibited some attributes of good civil society. Both maintained a relative independence from the regime: while the social movements evaded state control through their loose structure and extensive use of social media, the individual labor unions enjoyed a relatively wide independence because the heavily co-opted central leadership of the ETUF was not able to effectively exert control over all of them. Participation was on the rise as both the social movements, through the social media, and the labor unions, which boasted a huge membership, since the mid-2000s were increasingly able to mobilize their constituencies on the basis of common interests (which were predominantly economic grievances in the case of the labor movement and human rights issues or calls for political reforms in the case of the social movements). While both lacked effective empowerment, the labor unions were nevertheless able to influence state decisions (even if not policies) from time to time, which ingrained a sense of hope and perseverance in union activists.

Both social movements and labor unions were marked by the presence of cross-cutting cleavages. While this is not evident in the case of social movements like Kifaya, which had, despite coming from various political movements and parties, a rather narrow, elitist base, or the April 6 movement, whose core members were predominantly from the urban youth, their loose structure and the virtual anonymity of the social media allowed for the participation of a wide array of people with different views, beliefs and social backgrounds. In terms of the labor movement, the huge structure of the ETUF encompassed labor unions from all over the country and boasted a widely diverse membership. What was probably of the utmost importance, however, was the predisposition for tolerance and cooperation on the part of social movements like that of

the April 6 movement which allowed them to link up with the labor unions and form a coalition that would prove to be crucial in bringing down the Mubarak regime.

As presented, while social movements and labor unions display some (even if not all) attributes of good civil society, the major part of Egyptian civil society is made up of CSOs that clearly do not fit into this category. NGOs, which constitute over half of all CSOs, either lack effective empowerment or suffer from the absence of civility. Business and professional associations are primarily hampered by the lack of autonomy and cross-cutting cleavages. To this comes the increasing polarization between the secular and Islamist camps within civil society that leads to the predominance of uncivil attributes. Finally, while liberalization in Egypt started earlier than in most other Arab countries, civil society did not benefit from this permissive environment enough to develop political opportunity “holdovers,” which it could have resorted to in the period following the ouster of the Mubarak regime.

Beleaguered from two sides, civil society’s independence and civility was severely curtailed by the regime’s repression and co-optation on one side and by the Islamist incursion on the other. Especially the latter proved to be detrimental for the development of a good civil society, as after the fall of the Mubarak regime the resulting political opportunities emerging due to the slackening of state repression were not exploited by a civil society heavily permeated by uncivil attributes. This also implies that the widespread acceptance and tolerance witnessed during the uprisings did not take hold in civil society in the period of transition that followed. Instead, the historic moment soon passed when the new power-holders engaged in actions and proposed laws that were even more repressive than those of the Mubarak era.

In summary, the predominance of bad civil society in Egypt renders the prospects of democratization in the near future rather dim. Not all is lost for Egypt, however, as after the removal of Mohamed Morsi by the military it seems the country could get another chance to do it better this time. The question then becomes whether those CSOs that possess attributes of a good civil society but were largely put on the sidelines since the uprisings of 2011, such as the youth-based social movements and the labor unions, will be able to reclaim civil society from the Islamists in the future.

## **VII. ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter provides an overview of the role of civil society in political transformation in the Eastern European countries of the former Communist Bloc. Applying the conclusions drawn to the Middle Eastern case studies, the chapter then highlights important regional differences in the application of the individual criteria.

### **A. EASTERN EUROPEAN CASES: POLAND AND RUSSIA**

#### **1. Participation**

Comparing participation in associational life in Poland and Russia what is striking at first sight is the sheer difference in terms of numbers of people joining civil society organizations or engaging in collective action. Participation in Poland was extremely high during the period of Solidarity, but just as important, it was also present in periods of heightened repression. People engaged in collective action in the decades preceding Solidarity and even after the introduction martial law despite the risks involved. Contrary to this, participation in genuine grass-roots activity in Russia, apart from the 1920s, was weak to non-existent throughout most of the era of Communism. The level of repression does not provide a clear answer to this discrepancy as, apart from the horrors of Stalinism, repression of autonomous activity in Russia was not significantly higher than in Poland. Moreover, while both Russia and Poland featured totalitarian regimes, power-holders in both countries soon abandoned the goal of controlling every aspect of societal life to target active “troublemakers.” Thus, even if limited and put under heavy constraints, some public space was available in both countries for autonomous collective action. The reason for the weakness of grassroots action in the case of Russia lies elsewhere.

One decisive factor leading to increased grassroots mobilization in Poland, which was lacking for the most part in Russia, was the presence of a shared national and ideological identity uniting CSOs with starkly different societal backgrounds. Polish people regardless of class and origin fought for the survival of the national idea for centuries. When Polish sovereignty was again threatened by an external force, the Soviet

Union, distinct societal forces were able to rally under the flag of nationalism. Similarly, the Polish United Workers' Party, regarded by many Poles as puppets of the Soviets, had to fight for its legitimacy from the very beginning. Thus, the emerging ideological "us vs. them" scenario, with the PZPR on the one side and the Polish people on the other, promoted the mobilization of Polish civil society against the common "enemy," which eventually culminated in the roundtable talks between the opposition and the regime.

Contrary to that, the republican fragmentation of the Soviet Union and the lack of a direct threat (aside from the United States) to Russian identity during the Cold War period hindered the emergence of nationalism as a uniting factor in the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic. Moreover, the regime promoted an overarching proletariat class mentality with the ultimate aim to avoid the emergence of an ideological split within society. The effects of this were especially salient in the case of the labor movement which being bereft of an ideological "enemy" became a playground for competing political interests in the period of political transition. Thus, devoid of a uniting nationalism and ideology, Russian civil society had little propensity for mobilization against the existing regime. This also explains why despite the mushrooming of CSOs in the wake of Gorbachev's economic and political reforms, no mass-based social movement emerged in Russia, which could have engaged the regime in talks over political transition.

The low levels of participation, also a result of concerns over job security, were further aggravated by the monopoly of official trade unions in Russia. Contrary to Poland, where the deteriorating economy prevented the state from supporting the official trade unions with significant resources and thus workers were less dependent on them for maintaining their standard of living, in Russia the declining economy did not hinder the state from contributing to the prosperity of the official trade unions. Thus membership in them continued to be the only means to get access to an array of social welfare benefits. Independent trade unions, on the other hand, usually lacked significant resources and thus workers were not keen on joining them for fear of losing their benefits in the official labor unions. Therefore, contrary to Poland, membership in the independent trade unions remained low throughout the period of political transformation.

Thus, in terms of participation, the sheer number of CSOs in itself does not promote democratization; the underlying motives for participation also have to be taken into account. In this regard it is important to highlight the importance of an underlying shared national or ideological identity, which has the capability to mobilize the whole civil society, or at least the majority of it, against a common target in order to achieve a common goal. Moreover as the case of Poland shows, participation of the labor movement in oppositional grassroots activity is crucial for forcing the regime to engage in talks with the opposition. Worker mobilization, however, depends on the presence of independent trade unions enjoying sufficient legitimacy to attract a significant number of workers. Thus, in Russia where the labor movement was largely co-opted and bereft of its autonomy, civil society was not able to exert grassroots pressure on the political elite during the period of transition.

## **2. Empowerment**

Empowerment-wise, it is important to note that the legitimacy the regime enjoys significantly affects the influence civil society can exert on policy-makers. In Poland the regime had to struggle with its low acceptance among the populace, which forced it to concede more often than not to the demands of CSOs, especially to that of the workers' in order to retain a modicum of legitimacy. The labor movement, in particular, with its sheer numbers and the ability to control the means of production, if able to engage in collective action, is specifically empowered to wrest concessions from power-holders. The demands of the working class, however, usually focus on economic issues such as the improvement of living conditions. In order to empower civil society as a whole, economic demands have to be supplemented with political ones as any political concession by the regime, no matter how small, leads to a corresponding increase in public space available to autonomous grassroots actors. In Poland, striking workers in 1970 already articulated political demands, such as the creation of independent trade unions or the publication of uncensored newspapers.

At this point, however, it has to be noted that in order to truly empower civil society, political demands have to emerge as a result of genuine grassroots activity and

they have to transcend the boundaries of class interest. While this was indeed the case for the Polish workers, whose demands for greater autonomy were soon picked up by the intelligentsia leading to the emergence of the Solidarity movement, the Russian miners' strike of 1989 tells a different story. There the miners' economic demands, which focused mostly on the improvement of their own living conditions and which were largely met by the authorities, were complemented by political demands, such as autonomous mining enterprises, only at the encouragement of members of the political elite who saw the collective action of workers as a means to advance their own political interests. Therefore, even though the labor movement became highly politicized in the period leading to the dissolution of the Soviet Union, instead of exerting influence over power-brokers, it was the political elite, which for the most part controlled the grassroots activity of workers.

Moreover, effective empowerment also presupposes that the demands with which the regime is confronted include issues that the power-holders cannot use for their own advantage. The environmental movement in Russia, for example, despite ostensibly scoring some notable victories against state authorities, lacked real empowerment because the regime, eager to take advantage of every possibility to increase its own legitimacy, was easily convinced to side with the protesters against the "evil" local authorities on issues that were largely regarded as apolitical in nature. As the case of the wide variety of emerging social movements in Poland after the abolishment of martial law shows, engaging the regime on apolitical issues is not necessarily a bad thing in itself; it can expand the range of topics the regime deems legitimate and thus negotiable. In order to work this presupposes, however, the presence of a radical dissident movement, which pushes power-holders towards negotiations with grassroots activists deemed more moderate. While in Poland former radical leaders of the Solidarity movement released from prison in the mid-1980s posed a formidable challenge to the state, such a radical dissident movement was largely missing in Russia.

Finally, political opportunities, such as the need to obtain financial aid from international actors in the wake of economic decline, can significantly contribute to the empowerment of civil society. Contrary to the Soviet Union, where despite the failure of

Gorbachev's *perestroika* international aid remained a taboo (at least until the final stages of the dissolution of the USSR), in Poland the regime's resort to Western aid during the 1980s created opportunities for civil society to press the government to honor its commitments and introduce greater political liberalization.

All in all, the empowerment of civil society is promoted by the low internal legitimacy of the regime, the presence of genuine political demands transcending the boundaries of class interest, the existence of a radical dissident movement which can push the regime towards negotiations with moderate grassroots activists and political opportunities provided by external actors, which CSOs can take advantage of in order to influence power-holders.

### **3.     Autonomy**

State-socialist Poland had a long history of independent associational life and autonomous collective action, which did not cease to exist even in the wake of martial law, as dissidents created a parallel underground civil society providing autonomous space for collective action devoid of state interference. Moreover, even during the height of repression, civil society enjoyed some limited public space as the regime was forced to grant the new official organizations, which were established following the dissolution of Solidarity, at least a modicum of autonomy in order to endow them with a minimum of legitimacy in the eyes of Polish society. The official trade unions in the late 1980s recognized the declining legitimacy of the regime. Thus, to avoid losing their public appeal compared to that of the emerging independent trade unions, they tried to assert their autonomy from the state as much as they could, siding with members of the opposition during the roundtable talks with the regime. Lastly, the independence of the Polish Catholic Church throughout most of the period provided a safe haven for autonomous thinking and association.

Contrary to Poland, the RSFSR was almost completely devoid of autonomous associational life and collective action. Those independent movements and associations which managed to survive for a longer period of time, such as some human rights, environmental and peace groups were too small and fragmented to be the seeds of an

autonomous civil society, and eventually most of them were rendered irrelevant by the changing economic and political environment in the early 1990s. The emerging new independent CSOs in the wake of Gorbachev's reform policies suffered from the same deficiencies as they lacked a strong societal support and were mostly isolated from each other. Importantly, the independent trade unions which emerged out of the autonomous collective action of workers, lacking resources and thus a mass membership, were unable to ward off co-optation by the political elite. Moreover, contrary to Poland, official trade unions in Russia depended on the state for their prosperity and were thus not able to sever their ties to the political elite. This also contributed to their low legitimacy in the eyes of the workers. Lastly, the RSFSR was devoid of a large-scale integrative societal institution, which could have provided a shelter for alternative views and beliefs. Because of its dependence and weakness the Russian Orthodox Church was not able to fulfill this role.

In summary, independent associational life and collective action is most likely to take root in civil society if, apart from an overall slackening of repression, the regime suffers from low legitimacy, autonomous thinking and organization finds shelter in an underground civil society or a large-scale integrative societal institution and emerging CSOs enjoy sufficient social support and obtain the necessary resources to withstand regime co-optation.

#### **4. Cross-Cutting Cleavages**

The difference between civil societies in Poland and in Russia was probably the greatest in terms of cross-cutting cleavages within CSOs. In Poland the Solidarity movement, based on the alliance of workers, professionals, intellectuals, men and women, old and young, was a prime example of a grassroots initiative strengthened by cross-cutting cleavages. Moreover, Solidarity was permeated not just by the cross-cutting cleavages of people coming from different societal backgrounds; its resilience was also strengthened by the fact that it was joined by people from both sides of the ideological divide. At this point it is important to note that members of the PZPR joining Solidarity did this voluntarily and out of their own conviction, not as a means of the regime to

subvert and co-opt the movement. Naturally, the kitchen-sink nature of Solidarity meant that it encompassed a vast array of views, thoughts and beliefs, which ultimately led to the emergence of dissent, competition, and attrition within the movement. However, this was not a one-way process as it also implied that the people bringing in alternative thoughts and views, and thus changing the way Solidarity worked, were themselves subject to the impact of the range of cross-cutting cleavages they encountered, leading to their own transformation and ultimately to the transformation of their host organizations.

The Catholic Church played an extraordinary role in strengthening the cross-cutting cleavages of Polish civil society. The preservation of national identity endowed it with a role, which transcended class-boundaries and united people from across the society under the banner of nationalism. During periods of heightened repression it provided shelter for people regardless of class and conviction. Lastly, it played a very important role as an intermediary, bringing together workers and the intelligentsia, and later preparing the ground for negotiations between the dissidents and the regime.

Contrary to Poland, Russian civil society suffered from weak cross-cutting cleavages. Despite the attempts of the regime to instill a proletariat class mentality by promoting the classless character of official organizations, the deep mistrust dividing workers and the intelligentsia did not allow for the emergence of strong patterns of cross-cutting cleavages. Due to the weakness of the Orthodox Church, Russia also lacked a societal integrative institution which could have brought together workers and intellectuals. As a result, the emerging democratic movement in the late 1980s was dominated by the intelligentsia, which prohibited it from garnering mass support and gaining the legitimacy necessary to engage the regime in meaningful negotiations. On the other hand, neither was the fledgling labor movement able to exert significant pressure on the power-holders, as the weak cross-cutting cleavages within the movement left the workers vulnerable to political manipulation.

All in all, strong cross-cutting cleavages endow civil society with the necessary legitimacy to confront the regime in negotiations over political transformation, strengthen the resilience of CSOs to resist co-optation and fragmentation and instill tolerance towards alternative views and thoughts within civil society. The presence of a large-scale

integrative societal institution bringing together people from across society significantly contributes to the strengthening of cross-cutting cleavages.

#### *Political Opportunity “Holdovers”*

The significance of political opportunity “holdovers” is that their presence can significantly shorten the time necessary for civil society to reconstitute itself following periods of harsh repression. This becomes evident by comparing the development of civil societies in Poland and in Russia. In Poland, the memories of a liberal-pluralist past preceding the Communist takeover, coupled with the slackening of repression in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and ultimately, the emergence of the mass-based popular movement of Solidarity, provided civil society with ample opportunity to establish lasting “holdovers.” These “holdovers” were able to survive the period of harsh repression under martial law in the form of a parallel civil society. Given the presence of these opportunity “holdovers,” civil society was able to reconstitute itself quickly after the decline in state repression, providing the regime with a strong and legitimate negotiating partner with which to engage in constructive talks.

In Russia, on the other hand, the terrors of Stalinism erased all memories of the relatively vibrant associational life in the 1920s and, despite the slackening of repression in the late 1960s and during most of the 1970s, the absence of an integrative societal institution and the lack of a mass-based social movement prevented the emergence of political opportunity “holdovers.” Thus, when Gorbachev’s reforms provided political opportunities for the emergence of autonomous associational life and collective action, civil society had to reconstitute itself virtually from scratch. Given the rapid dismantling of the totalitarian regime, this did not allow for the emergence of a strong civil society able to check the political elite and act as a constructive negotiating partner in the period of political transition.

#### **5. Civility**

The abundance of civility within Polish civil society, and the lack thereof in the case of Russia, provides ample reason why democracy could take root in the former and why its emergence was blocked in the latter. Polish civil society possessed all the

underlying principles of civility. Most importantly, cooperation among the various segments of civil society developed in the second half of the 1970s, after earlier experiences of failed collective action showed that success can only be attained by individuals and groups acting together. The basis for the emerging coalition of the workers, the intelligentsia and the Catholic Church was the notion of a self-limiting civil society organized around the common values of human rights, dignity, and openness. These common values also allowed for the quick reconstitution of the cooperation of the various CSOs during the roundtable talks with the regime.

Cooperation was also promoted by the widespread tolerance for alternative views within Polish civil society and, most importantly, by the presence of solidarity among the various social classes. CSOs in Poland, in the period leading up to the emergence of Solidarity, were able to overcome their narrowly defined individual interests and participate on the basis of solidarity, which meant that CSOs from all over society supported each other and that protest action was usually terminated only after the demands of all CSOs involved had been met.

Complementing the civility of Polish civil society, beginning from the late 1970s, social interactions were guided by trust and reciprocity. Trust was most evident when collective action was maintained even in the face of harsh repression, especially during martial law, while reciprocity promoting cooperation between the workers and the intellectuals emerged in the second half of the 1970s, when the intelligentsia first provided support to the victims of repression. All these values ensured that the process of democratization in Poland in the late 1980s would be irreversible.

Contrary to Poland, Russian civil society suffered severely from a lack of civility. The slackening of regime control over public space in the late 1980s led to the emergence of a number of intolerant CSOs embracing chauvinistic and anti-Semitic values. Moreover, even when the majority of civil society did not display openly intolerant traits, the overall lack of the principles of civility in social interactions prevented a democratic mindset from taking root in Russian society. Cooperation among CSOs was severely hampered by the deep-seated mistrust prevalent between workers and the intelligentsia, which was also evident in the low levels of reciprocity. At the same time, the lack of

solidarity prevented CSOs, such as the workers and the cooperatives, from overcoming the divergence of their interests. The absence of solidarity was especially salient in the case of the Russian labor movement where it led to an overall decline of participation in protest action. Because of the widespread fear of workers of losing their jobs or having their social welfare benefits cut, authorities were able to easily buy off dissent among the working populace. As a result, individual victimized strikers could not count on the support of their appeased colleagues. Lastly, competition between the independent and the official trade unions over scarce resources and for the favor of the political elite further lessened the prospects of cooperation within the labor movement.

In summary, while cooperation is probably the most important principle of civility, without the beneficial effects of solidarity, trust, reciprocity and tolerance, it is unlikely to emerge among CSOs. The presence of solidarity is especially crucial, because it mobilizes CSOs for goals other than their own, prevents the isolation of collective action and lessens the regime's capability of buying off dissent.

## **6. Concluding Remarks**

While in the case of Poland all criteria of a good civil society were present at the time of political transformation, Russia was severely lacking in most of these traits when Yeltsin sealed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This, however, does not imply that Russian civil society in its entirety was bad. In the wake of Gorbachev's reforms several human rights, environmental, peace, and other groups emerged which were autonomous and exhibited the principles of civility. Participation in them, however, never reached a critical mass. They also lacked empowerment and suffered from weak cross-cutting cleavages.

The question then arises why, amidst the arising political opportunities of the late 1980s, did a good civil society shun the country that managed to have a relatively vibrant associational life even during the late period of the oppressive Tsarist regime, and the political turmoil in the decade following the Communist takeover? Two important propositions can be given to answer this question.

First, it has to be noted that Russian civil society was completely devoid of political opportunity “holdovers,” which it could have resorted to during its period of reemergence. This does not imply that political opportunity “holdovers” are crucial for the emergence of a good civil society. Based on a liberal-pluralist past, however, they can significantly reduce the time needed for a good civil society to reconstitute itself. Russian civil society did not enjoy the luxury of time, as the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the solidification of Yeltsin’s semi-authoritarian presidential rule happened at a pace which was hard to follow for Russian people and Western observers alike. While not suggesting that given enough time and all other things being equal Russia would have seen the emergence of a good civil society, the absence of political opportunity “holdovers” significantly impaired civil society’s chances of having an impact on the political transformation of the country.

Second, what is most striking is that in the country allegedly “ruled by the proletariat,” the labor movement was relegated to near insignificance during the period of transition. Lacking most of the criteria of a good civil society, the workers became a football for the interests of the emerging new political elite. Given the importance the labor movement played in the democratization of Poland, this might suggest that the reason for the absence of a good civil society, and thereby indirectly the failure of the democratic movement in Russia might be tied to the weakness of the grassroots initiatives of workers. After all, without the masses of workers giving legitimacy to democratic claims, the political elite had little reason to engage in talks with the emerging democrats.

## **B. MIDDLE EASTERN CASES: TUNISIA AND EGYPT**

Comparing Tunisian and Egyptian civil societies’ participation levels, it is evident that in terms of the sheer numbers of CSOs in proportion to the overall population, Egyptian associational life far surpassed that of Tunisia. Based on the conclusion drawn from the Eastern European cases, however, high numbers of isolated and fragmented CSOs are not indicative of a good civil society. Instead, what is important is participation of CSOs based on a shared national or ideological identity, which can bundle collective

action for a common cause. The long history of state building in both Tunisia and Egypt promoted the emergence of relatively strong national identities within civil societies, which was manifested in the ability of protesters in both countries to rally under the banner of national unity against the oppressive regimes.<sup>456</sup>

What differentiates these cases from Poland, however, is that in the Eastern European country national identity went hand in hand with the ideological goal of establishing a secular democratic political system. This ideological goal was largely missing in the case of Tunisia and Egypt, where protesters from all over society agreed on the need to get rid of the authoritarian rulers, but the divisions among secularists and Islamists prevented the emergence of a common understanding on the political system to follow. While in the case of Tunisia the differences did not hinder the establishment of an interim government, based on a coalition of secular and Islamist parties, in Egypt the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood became the principal governmental party (until its ouster by the military) brushing aside differing views from other parts of civil society. Thus, instead of the idea of national unity acting as a mobilizing force for the creation of a good civil society, in terms of participation some other factors have to explain the differences between Tunisian and Egyptian civil societies.

First, it is worth noting that both nationalism and ideology, apart from their unifying role, can also be conducive to the emergence of a bad civil society if their underlying principle is guided by intolerance towards others. Lacking a significant external threat, collective action based on national identity was directed in both Tunisia and Egypt against the authoritarian regimes. Thus, nationalism did not foster intolerance towards external parties. The Arab-Israeli conflict, however, due to its historical legacy, had a much greater impact on the ideological unity of Egyptian civil society than it had on Tunisia, spurring intolerant patterns of behavior in the former.

Second, based on its significant role in Poland's transition, the labor movement's involvement in collective action might shed some light on the differences of Tunisian and Egyptian civil societies. While the official trade unions in both countries boasted huge

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<sup>456</sup> Gelvin, *The Arab Uprisings*, 36.

memberships and through their local branches, which showed signs of good CSOs engaged in collective action in the period preceding the revolts of the Arab Spring, following the ousters of the Ben Ali and Mubarak regimes their participation was marked by stark differences. While in Egypt, the ETUF and the new independent trade unions were largely left on the sidelines in terms of participating in the formation of the country's political future, the UGTT in Tunisia remained heavily involved by acting as an intermediary in negotiations between the government and the opposition, and thus continued to exert grassroots pressure on the political elite.<sup>457</sup>

In terms of empowerment of civil society similar to the Polish case, both the Ben Ali regime and the Mubarak regime suffered from low internal legitimacy as a result of their repressive, authoritarian nature and the widespread corruption present in governmental affairs. This forced them to co-opt the leaderships of unruly CSOs, while appeasing militant workers by granting largely economic concessions. As it did in the Polish case, the concessions taught CSOs lessons in articulating demands and employing collective action more effectively. Thus, instead of appeasing workers, regime responsiveness over time increased their militancy. The significance of this became evident during the uprisings of the Arab Spring, when the labor movement in both Tunisia and Egypt tipped the scales in favor of the protesters.

Moreover, both in Tunisia and Egypt CSOs increasingly understood that they could only hope to wrest concessions from the regime when their demands (economic and political alike) transcended the narrow boundaries of their own class interests. This proved to be crucial during the revolts of the Arab Spring when secularists and Islamists, workers and intellectuals alike were able to put aside their differences and support the demands of the other side. This unlikely alliance, however, soon fell apart in Egypt when the Muslim Brotherhood became less responsive to the needs of other CSOs after its political arm had successfully competed in the 2011 and 2012 parliamentary, Shura Council and presidential elections. In Tunisia, on the other hand, a multitude of CSOs

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<sup>457</sup> Tarek Amara, "Tunisia Union Offers Plan to End Political Crisis," *Reuters*, September 17, 2013, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/09/17/us-tunisia-crisis-idUSBRE98G13420130917>.

continued to support each other even after Ben Ali's flight, leading to the ouster of the remnants of the *ancien régime* and civil society's deep involvement in the adoption of several new laws, such as the one on associations in September 2011.<sup>458</sup>

While in the case of Tunisia and Egypt one cannot speak of the presence of radical dissident movements pushing the regime towards negotiations with moderate CSOs, the fact that in Tunisia the moderate al-Nahda has come to power, as opposed to radical Islamists, enhances the prospects for negotiations with civil society. Contrary to this, in Egypt the ouster of Mohamed Morsi and the Freedom and Justice Party from power by the military will most likely result in the radicalization of the again outlawed Muslim Brotherhood, significantly reducing the opportunities for dialogue between the regime and a major part of civil society.

Finally, while Tunisia becoming a privileged partner of the European Union in November 2012 opens up new political opportunities for the empowerment of civil society, the foreseeable spread of radicalism in Egypt will most likely limit the emergence of external political opportunities that CSOs will be able to take advantage of in influencing power-holders.

In terms of independence, preceding the Arab Spring the regimes in both Tunisia and Egypt provided some public space to autonomous associational life and collective action in order to bolster their own legitimacy and establish a state-controlled civil society acting as a counterweight to radical Islamism. In Tunisia, the lack of a mass-based Islamist movement, however, allowed room for some genuine CSOs, most notably the UGTT and the human rights movement. These movements tried to assert their independence from the state.

By contrast, civil society in Egypt was beleaguered from two sides. On one side, CSOs struggled to fend off regime efforts of co-optation; on the other, they became too weak to resist an Islamist takeover during the process, which usually led to internal bickering and factionalism. Thus, even in the periods when the liberalizing policies of the

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<sup>458</sup> *Local Empowerment, Global Impact*, Annual Report (International Center for Not-for-Profit Law, 2011), 8, [www.icnl.org](http://www.icnl.org).

regime allowed for the emergence of some autonomous forms of associational life, Islamist infiltration, accompanied by uncivil attributes, prevented genuine grassroots activism from becoming ingrained in Egyptian civil society. Moreover, while emerging social movements and independent trade unionism in the period preceding the Arab Spring indeed carried the seeds of autonomous collective action, following the ouster of the Mubarak regime they were outmaneuvered by a civil society under Islamist influence and thus, were largely left on the sidelines in shaping the political future of the country.

In addition, while in Egypt (and to a much lesser degree also in Tunisia) autonomous thinking and associational life did indeed find shelter in mosques and other religious institutions, contrary to the Polish case, these manifestations of grassroots activism were not able to act as messengers of good civil society as they were heavily influenced by intolerant forms of Islamism.

Finally, the autonomy of civil society was severely hampered in Tunisia and Egypt before the revolts of the Arab Spring; the regimes in both countries exerted considerable financial control over CSOs and foreign funding was often used as a pretext by the authorities to delegitimize associations trying to achieve greater financial independence. In Egypt, however, the repression against CSOs receiving foreign funds continued even after the overthrow of the Mubarak regime, while in Tunisia civil society's need for foreign assistance in the wake of the Arab Spring was largely recognized and facilitated by the adoption of a legal framework.<sup>459</sup> Moreover, in Egypt criticism is largely directed against Western assistance provided to secular liberal and pro-democracy CSOs, but not against the financial sources Islamist groups obtain from the Gulf States. By contrast, in Tunisia the financial backing al-Nahda and other Islamist forces receive from the Gulf is subject to profound public scrutiny.<sup>460</sup>

In terms of cross-cutting cleavages, CSOs in both Tunisia and Egypt suffered from a lack thereof, which undermined their capability to resist regime co-optation and fragmentation. The only exceptions to the rule were the UGTT in Tunisia and the various

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<sup>459</sup> Kristina Kausch, "*Foreign Funding*" in *Post-revolution Tunisia* (AFA, Fride and Hivos, 2013), 2, [http://edoc.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/receive/HALCoRe\\_document\\_00015042](http://edoc.bibliothek.uni-halle.de/receive/HALCoRe_document_00015042).

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

new social movements and the ETUF in Egypt, which boasted diverse memberships and, in the case of the labor unions, a nationwide network of local branches, enabling them to better withstand regime efforts of co-optation. Thus, contrary to Poland, where it was the Catholic Church which acted as a large-scale societal institution bringing people together from across society, in Tunisia and Egypt this role was in part played by the labor movements.

There was, however, also a significant difference regarding cross-cutting cleavages in Tunisian and Egyptian civil societies. Whereas in Tunisia large parts of the civil society underwent a process of “elitization” which also affected the Islamists of al-Nahda, in Egypt the civil society and, most importantly the Muslim Brotherhood, was largely devoid of a similar process. As a result, while in Tunisia the elitist al-Nahda had difficulties establishing links with large parts of the population, in Egypt the Muslim Brotherhood’s vague goals and service-providing character appealed to people from across the whole society, enabling it to infiltrate a wide array of CSOs. Thus, while cross-cutting cleavages generally contribute to greater resilience and tolerance within civil society, the fact that in Egypt it was to be found in an organization that lacked tolerance in many aspects hindered the emergence of a good civil society there.

In terms of political opportunity “holdovers,” the development of civil societies in Tunisia and Egypt starkly diverged from one another. In Tunisia in the wake of the Ben Ali regime’s short-lived liberal reforms at the end of the 1980s many CSOs embraced values reminiscent of that of a good civil society such as participation, legality and tolerance towards alternate views. Following the significant increase of the authoritarian tendencies of the Ben Ali regime, this might not have resulted in the emergence of political opportunity “holdovers,” but the fact that in Tunisia the Personal Code guaranteed a minimum level of liberal rights, and that Tunisian civil society was less threatened by an Islamist takeover, allowed some seeds of a good civil society to take root. The memories of a relatively liberal environment of collective action later served as a mobilizing resource in the face of regime repression during the 2010–2011 uprising and allowed for the quick reemergence of a civil society able to shape the development of the political future of the country in the period of transition. Contrary to this, even though

civil society in Egypt enjoyed a comparatively longer period of political liberalization, because of the Islamist incursion into CSOs the political opportunity “holdovers” that emerged served largely the interests of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was able to quickly reconstitute itself in the aftermath of the Mubarak regime’s ouster and dominate the national elections in the ensuing period. What follows is that, while political opportunity “holdovers” might take hold even in civil societies exhibiting uncivil attributes during periods of political liberalization, they have to be a result of tolerant grassroots activism in order to promote the reemergence of a good civil society.

Finally, in terms of civility, civil societies in Tunisia and Egypt during the Arab Spring showed many similarities to the Polish Solidarity movement in 1980. CSOs in both Arab countries understood that they had to cooperate with each other in order to achieve their common goal of getting rid of the long-standing repressive regimes. This common goal helped secularists and Islamists overcome the deep-seated mistrust dividing them, much like the workers and the intelligentsia were able to put aside their differences in Poland. Values such as solidarity, reciprocity, and tolerance emerged during the protests when CSOs with starkly different worldviews and agendas supported and aided each other in the face of regime repression.

There was, however, a big difference between the Tunisian and Egyptian civil societies and the Solidarity movement. While Solidarity was the archetype of a self-restraining civil society not intent on challenging the power of the state, CSOs in both Arab countries united with the aim of toppling the ruling regimes. This had profound consequences on the development of civil societies in the countries analyzed. The fact that civil society in Poland focused primarily on self-organization implied that the tenuous fabric of cooperation between the vastly different societal groups did not come under strain from the disagreements that otherwise would have likely emerged over the political future of the country. This allowed Polish civil society to instill the basic norms of civility which later promoted its unified engagement in constructive talks with the regime over political transformation.

On the other hand, civil societies in Tunisia and Egypt did not enjoy this period of relatively harmonious coexistence because immediately after the overthrow of the Ben

Ali and Mubarak regimes they were confronted with the realities of deciding the political future of their countries, which threatened to cut through the tenuous fabric of cooperation between the various CSOs. The fact that this did not occur in Tunisia might be attributed to the overall higher levels of tolerance ingrained in society by the progressive laws of the Personal Code and the relatively moderate character of its dominant Islamist movement, which for the time being allowed for the maintenance of the fragile alliance between secularists and Islamists. In Egypt, on the other hand, the deep polarization between secularists and Islamists, ingrained in society in part as a result of regime policies over the preceding decades, soon came to the fore when the uniting goal of overthrowing the Mubarak regime disappeared and the starkly contrasting ideas on the country's future political (and social) system deprived CSOs from a common ground of understanding.

Thus, what follows is that civil society needs to embrace some basic norms of civility before democratization can take place. As the case of Egypt shows, if civil society lacks values such as tolerance, cooperation, and solidarity, its liberation from under the yoke of an authoritarian regime will most likely not increase the prospects of democratization. Instead, civil society itself might reproduce the same authoritarian patterns it has been fighting against.

### **C. CONCLUSION**

This analysis has demonstrated that, in line with Eva Bellin's argument of fighting Middle East exceptionalism,<sup>461</sup> civil societies in the former Communist Eastern Europe and the Arab world can be subject to a comparative study highlighting their similarities, discrepancies, and their roles played in democratization. It also found, however, that conducting a cross-regional analysis effectively requires differentiating between good and bad civil societies. By introducing a list of objective criteria, this allowed for avoiding the pitfall of not being able to speak of civil society in the Middle East in case the nature of Arab grassroots activism did not align with Western conceptions of the idea.

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<sup>461</sup> Bellin, "Civil Society," 510.

With regard to the individual criteria, the thesis found that participation, empowerment, autonomy, cross-cutting cleavages, political opportunity “holdovers,” and civility all contribute to the emergence of a good civil society, which in turn significantly increases the likelihood that a democratic polity will take root and the process of democratization becomes irreversible. The analysis, however, does not provide clarity on the significance of each individual criterion in the process. At this point it has to be surmised that their significance is most likely dependent on the political opportunities arising and is bound to change over time.

On the other hand, the study highlighted important regional differences in the application of the criteria. In terms of participation it found that apart from reaching a critical mass with the active involvement of the labor movement, grassroots activism should not only be guided by an overarching national identity, but also be based on an ideological unity regarding the nation’s future political development. Empowerment-wise it is important that regime responsiveness is not limited to satisfying narrowly defined class-based economic interests, but also includes genuine, grassroots based political concessions to the benefit of the whole society. In terms of autonomy it found that contrary to Eastern Europe, CSOs in the Middle East not only have to fight regime attempts of control and co-optation, but they are also vulnerable to Islamist incursion. While in Eastern Europe cross-cutting cleavages were often promoted by religious institutions, in the Middle East this role is partly played by the labor movements.

Furthermore, the study also found that cross-cutting cleavages play a beneficial role only in the case they are found in CSOs embracing values of civility. Similarly, political opportunity “holdovers” only promote the emergence of a good civil society if they convey memories of grassroots activism based on civility. Finally, based on the study’s findings, what can be asserted is that without the all-encompassing presence of civility and its underlying principles of tolerance and cooperation a good civil society is very unlikely to emerge in any society. While in Eastern Europe civility was in many cases strengthened by the self-restraining nature of civil society, the absence of this notion in the Middle East largely inhibits the emergence of good civil societies.

Moreover, it has to be reconfirmed that good civil society in itself is not sufficient or even a necessary precondition to put a non-democratic country on the path of democratization. A complex set of political opportunities must align in order for democratization to happen. For the purposes of this thesis the roles of two of them will be highlighted in the case of Poland and Russia: regime responsiveness and a political society based on a good civil society. While Poland had both a regime willing to engage in talks with the political opposition over political transformation and a democratically aligned political society emerging out of the Solidarity movement, in Russia political transformation was largely a product of elite bargaining made possible by the weakness of the oppositional political society. Thus, while a good civil society might be required to provide a fledgling democratic movement with the necessary impetus, and once on track, ensure the irreversibility of the democratic process, it is by no means the only factor students of democratic theory have to take into account.

Finally, the thesis also shed light on the need to apply different conceptions of civil society to Eastern Europe and the Middle East. Dissidents in Eastern Europe understood civil society mostly in the Lockean sense of a self-regulating entity counterbalancing state power, to which, given the fact that the totalitarian nature of the oppressing regimes rendered direct opposition hopeless, they added elements of the Gramscian view on the need to first hegemonize social relations within civil society in order to challenge political power. The influence of the Gramscian idea became most evident in the self-restraining nature of civil societies in most countries of Communist Eastern Europe.

On the other hand, this notion of a self-restraining civil society was entirely missing in the case of Tunisia and Egypt. Civil society's mobilization to topple the repressive regimes in the Arab world suggests that the application of the Marxian concept of revolutionary transformation reunifying state and society in order to bring about civility might be more appropriate in the Middle Eastern context. As the case of Egypt shows, however, without a state providing order through laws and regulations, civil society threatened from within by the incursion of Islamism may not be able to reproduce the patterns of civility necessary for promoting democratization on its own. This idea of a

civil society waging a two-front war against regime repression and Islamist incursion constitutes the conundrum of good civil society in the Middle East. On the one hand, as the Eastern European examples have proved, civil society needs to develop civility from within to effectively push an authoritarian regime towards greater democratization. On the other hand, in line with the Hegelian idea, if civility is not forthcoming by itself, the state needs to step in to create a public space favorable to civility through the means of a legal framework. In the Middle East, the presence of both of these conditions seems to be elusive. As the case of Tunisia might prove, however, a combination of a civil society featuring norms of civility supported by a tolerant form of Islamism and a political society adhering to those norms may very well provide the answer to the conundrum.

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