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Abstract. Since Putnam published *Making Democracy Work*, his seminal work on the effect of civic associationalism in promoting better institutional performance, many other studies have confirmed the deleterious effects of civil society in promoting democratic breakdown and malperformance. To solve the empirical puzzle as to whether civil society is a bane or boon for democracies, this article examines the effect of the pre-transitional strength and post-transitional density of civil society on state institutional performance among more than 60 states since the third wave. The results show that the strength of civil society prior to transition and its density post-transition not only play a significant role in the deepening of political freedoms and civil liberties among transitional citizens, but also lead to better institutional performance. Hence, Putnam's major findings can be extended in the context of third- and fourth-wave democracies.

Keywords: • Civil society • Fourth-wave democratization • Institutional performance • Nongovernmental organizations • Quality of governance • Third-wave democratization

Introduction: Framing the Conundrum

Can a strong and dense civil society facilitate the sustainability of democracy? This is a perennial question that has captivated and perplexed the minds of scholars since the early 19th century when Alexis de Tocqueville (1966) argued that American civic associationalism facilitated a strong sense of democratic citizenship. This belief was revived and received strong empirical endorsement when Robert Putnam (1993) demonstrated the link between civic associationalism and institutional performance. More recently, Mark Warren (2001) provided important theoretical elaboration on how civil society encourages associational life that may provide the pillars for good governance. Warren says:

> Associations may contribute to institutional conditions and venues that support, express, and actualize individual and political autonomy as well as transform autonomous judgments into collective decisions. (Warren, 2001: 61)

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Thus, societies that have a strong civil society may have a tendency to experience higher levels of political representation, enabling collective groups to resist unpopular state policies and apply pressure on state institutions when they find they have erred. In fact associational types of civil society may be recognized as a formidable component that provides an alternative source of governance through the process of subsidiarity. Warren's work implies that strong associations have indirect effects on institutions, primarily by challenging the state through vocal opposition or other sources of collective movements aimed at influencing the state to change its public policy course. Civil society groups can provide better social services than the state is capable of, and sometimes can even have a more efficient way of mitigating social exigencies. However, Warren cautions that associational groups may sometimes champion antidemocratic sentiments and in fact conform to the Madisonian pronouncement that associations elicit factional splits and promote societal cleavages.

Indeed, extant scholarship has shown confounding results regarding civil society's impact in improving the quality of democracy. For instance, Bermeo and Nord's (2000) work advances the argument that in 19th-century Europe, civil society's excesses did not necessarily promote the longevity of democracy, because its many configurations did not play a convincing role in promoting a democratic political culture. Sydney Tarrow (1996) also puts forward the argument that civil society per se does not promote better governance. Rather, states that have a high level of organizational capacity (those that have institutionalized the rule of law and achieved high levels of legitimacy) are more likely to foster polities that can have strong civil societies. In the end, strong state institutions matter more than civil society in promoting good governance (Encarnacion, 2003). Others also claim that the relationship between civil society and institutional performance is mutually reinforcing (see Gill, 2000).

Ariel Armony (2004) offers one of the first extensive empirical studies in this area. By focusing on contemporary Argentina, he discovers that although the presence of human rights and civil rights groups brought awareness to human rights abuses, these groups had a very minimal influence in implementing judicial and police reforms. In fact human rights groups were restrained in promoting higher levels of political participation. His cross-national sample of 28 old and new democracies also shows that group membership in voluntary associations, such as those he defined as "Putnamesque" and "Olsonian,"[1] do not have a statistically positive effect in promoting better institutional performance.

Armony's study reminds us that scholars are still debating the effect of civil society on democratization and solid empirical research is still lacking in this area. Jonathan Fox (2000: 1) is also skeptical:

> Civil society's contribution to accountable governance has been widely asserted, but the causal mechanisms that determine the patterns of civil society's influence on horizontal accountability have not been well specified.

This article is therefore aimed at addressing an empirical puzzle that begs to be resolved in the realm of comparative politics. I conduct an empirical test based on a design involving more than 60 states that transitioned from authoritarianism or a communist past and investigate if a strong and dense civil society promotes better institutional performance.

Since Armony's work is important, it is useful to elaborate how this present study differs from his work. First, the case selection here centers mostly on third- and

fourth-wave democracies, and excludes nations that are established democracies (which composed more than half of Armony's cases). I exclude first-wave and second-wave democracies from the analysis because, as Rose and Shin (2001) posit, such states have had a longer experience with democracy and, in fact, have better state institutional performance, while third-wave states are qualitatively different institutionally because they democratized backwards. Put simply, third-wave states have inherent institutional deficits because they had elections prior to the establishment of the rule of law and multiple institutions of civil society. By focusing the cases solely among states that transitioned since the third wave, we can test if Putnam's major claim has generalizability in contemporary democratization research. Second, the article uses two different independent variables that tap into the concept of civil society: the new Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) measure of the pre-transitional strength of civil societies and nongovernmental organization (NGO) organizational and membership density (Glasius et al., 2002). The use of these variables taps into the macro-level aspect of civil society that is quite different from the aggregate micro-level aspects of group membership (using primarily national means of group membership from the World Values Survey data), which may suffer from problems of the individualistic or ecological fallacy.[2] Third, the empirical analysis includes a wide assortment of societal variables (ranging from Protestantism to ethnic fractionalization) that prior research has shown to have a long-standing, robust effect on a state's institutional performance (La Porta et al., 1998).

The empirical results show that the strength of civil society before the transition and NGO density post-transition not only deepen freedom and civil liberties, as discovered by Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005), but also enhance the state's capacity to entrench the rule of law, control the prevalence of corruption, and promote governmental effectiveness, regulatory quality, voice and accountability, and political stability – findings that are clearly contrary to Armony's models that produce statistically insignificant null results.

The article proceeds in seven sections. The first section provides an overview of the difficulty of defining civil society. The second section reviews the evidence about the positive effects of civil society on the polity and the controversies that such findings have elicited. The next section evaluates the literature that demonstrates how civil society can pose a threat to regime stability and weaken constitutionalism, thus fomenting political instability. The fourth section presents the hypotheses and the research design. The fifth section discusses the data-collection process and the operationalization of variables. I discuss the results in the sixth section. The seventh section concludes and expands on theoretical insights.

Defining Civil Society

There is an important empirical challenge in defining what constitutes civil society. Any grouping that assumes representation of collective interests can be claimed as part of civil society, or civil society may be defined as the totality of civic engagements citizens commit to join in the polity (Anheir, 2004; Cohen and Arato, 1992; Walzer, 1991). At other times, the concept of civil society is conflated with that of social capital, as in the work of Michael Edwards (2004). Edwards' conceptual definition of civil society includes civic engagements that promote an associational life, a good society, and a public sphere in which ideas and ideologies can be discussed and debated. (However, Edwards himself [2004: 24]

deplores the fact that the proliferation of internationally registered civil society groups or NGOs post-1989 has caused some scholars to lump all prominent civil society groups into one big tent, when in fact their organizational missions are so diverse and not all are dedicated to promoting better institutional performance. He also notes that there may be civil society groups that are so buried away in rural hinterlands that they may not be recognized by the academic community or policy circles at all.

Empirical research has, in fact, largely relied on a definition of civil society that confounds the term with civil society activism, cultural capital, civic associationalism, and social capital. This analytical confusion has prompted criticism and reform. The most stinging critique comes from Foley and Edwards (1996, 1998), who believe scholars have engaged in operational opportunism that has given inaccurate conceptualizations of civil society. They argue that the context dependency of defining civil society has prompted efforts to extract and dilute civil society's core features or find new cleavages that can be derived from it, which can then be operationalized and measured in any situation and in any period.

Others have tried to meet the criticism head on. Kenneth Newton (1997) categorized civil society into norms, networks, and resources, an approach carried on in more recent research, as when Gibson (2001) looked at the impact of the density of social networks (a proxy for civil society) on facilitating citizen support for democracy in Russia. Larry Diamond (1999) has responded by offering a parsimonious definition of civil society as it relates to democratic politics. For Diamond (1999: 221), civil society is "The realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-generating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, [and] that is bound by a legal order or a set of shared collective rules." In this definition, civil society is composed of social actors who recognize the primacy of state authority and the rule of law, permitting Diamond to exclude groups that are formed with the goal of destabilizing the state. Linz and Stepan (1996) have adopted this definition in their work as well.

The Argument that the Effects of Civil Society are Positive

Numerous studies have argued that the effects of civil society are positive, an argument often defended by reference to the work of NGOs in promoting development, labor solidarity, democratic accountability, and post-materialist causes in the developing world (Anheir, 2004; A.-M. Clark, 1995; J. Clark, 1995; Hilhorst, 2003; Howell and Pearce, 2001; Kaviraj and Khilnani, 2001; Ron et al., 2005). Scholars have verified that NGOs can challenge the abuses of executive or legislative authority, and minimize arbitrary policies imposed by the state. Sometimes they are able to compel properly authorized state authorities to prosecute, penalize, sanction, or punish errant public officials (Schmitter, 1993). NGOs can act as an institutional alternative that can monitor the transparency and efficacy of legislation and can expose to the public the intensity or forms of client–patron relations, prebendalism, cronyism, and nepotism in governance at the local or national levels (Burnell and Calvert, 2005; Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Ndegwa, 1994). Associational NGOs also have mechanisms that can promote social tolerance which can minimize political violence and defuse ethnic rivalries (Varshney, 2001, 2002). Dense NGO activity can also establish a constant flow of information to the masses that can expose governmental malfeasance or inefficiency with high

regularity or publicity (Schedler, 1999a, 1999b). Such NGOs can typically form an organized entity that can give the mass public a vehicle to articulate their demands or grievances, especially in states that have fluid and ideologically empty party systems, as is common in transitional states, thereby building a solid constituency of active economic and political reform (Diamond, 1994, 1999).

But basing the argument on NGOs can be problematic. NGOs are usually nonprofit organizations that gain at least a portion of their funding from private sources. The fact that some are prone to be dependent on international funding has led some scholars to argue that NGOs are not really local actors of civil society. Rather, they are beholden to the interests of larger international forces that promote globalization directives, structural adjustment policies, and the interests of international financial donors (Kamat, 2002; Mendelson and Glenn, 2002). Some NGOs are partially funded by the state or elite structures domestically, and hence their developmental or state-accountability agenda can be co-opted by external forces that do not truly represent societal or sectoral interests. Likewise, the reverse is true: excessive NGO pluralism and its independence from the state can make NGOs free to impose the agenda of their donors or commercial supporters without accountability from the state. Hence, NGOs can devise development policies that are destructive without external monitoring from experienced and established state agencies (Edwards and Hulme, 1996; Fox and Brown, 1998; Meyer, 1992).

Nonetheless, contemporary scholarship is strongly committed to the idea that the organizations of civil society play a strongly positive role in facilitating democracy. We may trace this back to the work of Gabriel Almond and Sidney Verba (1963) linking civic culture with the growth of liberal democracies, but the tendency is particularly pronounced since the publication of Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1993).[3] Civil society, it is said, promotes democratic sustainability and enhances state institutional performance.

Implicit in this theoretical discourse is a historically path-dependent argument. That is, a state with low levels of civic associationalism is more prone to having institutions with substandard performance in terms of bureaucratic effectiveness, while states with an abundance of vibrant autonomous groups are more likely to experience effective governance. Variation in the strength of civil society is therefore the key determinant that made Northern Italy an industrial region with much promise and economic development and Southern Italy a backward region, prone to amoral familism, vertical client–patron relations, and economic underdevelopment.

Other scholars agree: membership in voluntary organizations, such as labor unions, guilds, professional organizations, clubs, bowling leagues, birdwatching clubs, and other organized groups promote a sense of community. A nation that has a strong sense of civic-mindedness and membership in such organizations should expect to have citizens that are tolerant of diversity, have a high level of mutual trust, and are more compromise seeking (Barron et al., 2001; Cohen and Arato, 1992; Ehrenberg, 1999; Fullinwider, 1999; Hann and Dunn, 1996; Janoski, 1998; Keane, 1998; Margalit, 1996; Putnam, 1993). Thus, a strong civil society promotes an associational culture which can facilitate a network and web of social connectedness that enhances ever deeper levels of communitarianism and social integration. As such, a state with high levels of civil society promotes a democratic political culture, which is a pattern of widely shared attitudes and

values supportive of democratic institutions and procedures. It is argued that once civil society is formed, it creates social capital, a reservoir citizens can tap (like a savings-bank account) that will allow them further to cultivate elongated social networks. These networks will promote a strengthened sense of democratic citizenship that will compel citizens to demand state accountability.

Although there have been controversies surrounding Putnam's empirical claims, as we note in the following section, recent scholarship has validated the claim that high levels of civic associationalism play an instrumental role in the process of democratization (see Foweraker and Landman, 1997). For instance, from Eastern Europe and Latin America to Central Asia organized and associational groups gathered to sign petitions, promote anti-regime rallies and demonstrations against despotic regimes, and concomitantly remained active in calling for the accountability, transparency, and responsiveness of state institutions many years after democratic transition. Solidarity in Poland, Charter 77 in the Czech Republic, Namfrel in the Philippines, and other anti-authoritarian civil society groups played critical roles in dismantling the authoritarian anciens régimes. Post-transition, such groups created an institutional environment that made it easy for other civil society groups to take their stead and flourish, in order to demand good governance from newly installed democratic institutions and leaders. Thus, scholars such as Diamond (1994, 1999), Linz and Stepan (1996), O'Donnell (1999), Schedler (1999a, 1999b), and Schmitter (1993) concur: a strong civil society is a defining characteristic of consolidated democracies.

The positive effects of civil society are also documented in extensive detail by research in East-Central Europe (Toepler and Salamon, 2003), Latin America (Feinberg et al., 2006), Africa (Gyimah-Boadi, 2004), and Central Asia (Howell and Pearce, 2001). In sum, these studies find that a strong civil society is a boon for enhancing the sustainability of democratic governance and institutional performance.

The Argument that the Effects of Civil Society are Negative

Despite the weight of positive evidence, the argument favoring civil society has received criticism and, in some cases, empirical contradiction. The work by Putnam and his followers has been criticized for a range of errors, from cultural determinism to promoting erroneous causal chains (see critiques by Granato et al., 1996a, 1996b; Jackman and Miller, 1996a, 1996b; Muller and Seligson, 1994; Swank, 1996). Recent research by Solt (2004) claims that Putnam's original argument is outright wrong: the socioeconomics and history of land redistribution matter more than civil society in determining higher levels of Italian political participation that can facilitate better institutional performance.

Classical criticisms that warn about the ill-consequences of civil society have been articulated by Samuel Huntington (1968), who believes that among pretorian societies excessive group mobilization exacerbates social tensions and can delegitimize a functional state. In one of his earlier works, Juan Linz (1978) issued a warning that a strong civil society promotes regime instability, primarily because outside groups such as trade unions or working-class societies can have too much influence in policymaking. Their direct connection with the state can usurp the state's moral imperative to govern in times of crisis and promote inefficient governance. Guillermo O'Donnell's (1979) early work on bureaucratic

authoritarianism demonstrated that the mobilization of populist societal groups can exert an inordinate amount of pressure on elite interests, as in facilitating the rise of military juntas and oppressive dictatorships in South America.

This pessimism with civil society has been more pronounced in third-wave democracies (primarily in Latin America) that have witnessed people-power uprisings triggered by an unrestrained civil society that toppled constitutionally elected or appointed presidents since the late 1990s. According to Arturo Valenzuela (2004), the Latin American region is prone to having interrupted presidencies whereby chief executives were unable to fulfill their constitutional duties of governing because of civil society's political activism. Such interruptions are critical because they abrogate the institutionalization of the rule of law and the primacy of constitutional governance. Brysk (2000) also posits that civil society groups in Latin America have returned authoritarian leaders in Guatemala and Bolivia, and destroyed democratic gains in Venezuela and Ecuador.

To substantiate this further, there is an active line of research that disagrees with the notion that civil society is a panacea that can promote democratic sustainability. Sheri Berman (1997a, 1997b) challenges the optimism of using civil society as a catch-all cure for the institutional deficits of transitional states. Berman claims that history has shown that strong civil societies, absent a strong state, can facilitate societal discord. In the case of Weimar Germany, strong civic nationalism led to the rise of the Nazi party – a party that was utterly inimical to the tenets of liberal democracy.

The so-called Berman critique of civil society argues that civic groups can produce cleavage structures, creating organizations that are subversive, radical, seditious, insurgent, and revolutionary.[4] In other cases, civil society groups may even inflame the genocidal proclivities of a divided society, as evidenced in Rwanda in 1994 (Armony, 2004; see also Mamdani, 2001). Hence, as Armony (2004: 56–103) calls it, the undemocratic and illiberal nature of civil society groups can be referred to as the "serpent's egg." Is this a warning to neo-Tocquevilleans to refrain from advocating civil society as a catch-all panacea that can generate better governance, political stability, or promote democratic consolidation among third-wave and fourth-wave democracies?

Hypotheses and Research Design

Theoretically, it has been shown that civil society is a primary prerequisite that can deliver better institutional performance and greater levels of horizontal accountability. Based on a review of extant theories on civil society, the following hypotheses are therefore formulated:

> *Hypothesis 1: States with strong and dense civil society groups and membership formations (before and after transition) are more likely to deepen the level of political and civil liberties of citizens, while controlling for pertinent societal variables.*
> *Hypothesis 2: States with strong and dense civil society groups and membership formations (before and after transition) are more likely to experience better institutional performance, while controlling for pertinent societal variables.*

To conduct the analysis, I employ Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression using Robust Standard Errors to control for heteroskedasticity. A correlation

matrix aimed at looking at inflated values of Pearson's *r* among the independent variable and control variables confirms that there is no potential problem with multi-collinearity. This is corroborated by Variance Inflation Factor (VIF) scores below the numerical value of four, which indicate the absence of collinearity (see Fox, 1997).

Data Collection and Operationalization

Cases

I limit my cases to 65 states that have transitioned since the third wave of democratization began. I do so because the research question is concerned with the role of civil society in the contemporary process of democratization. The temporal span of my dataset therefore features states that transitioned during 1974–2001. I only include cases wherein a state (1) transitioned from a one-party system to a multiparty system, (2) transitioned from authoritarian rule to democratic rule, (3) transitioned from a civil war that gave way to a new democratic polity, or (4) was created from the peaceful decomposition of a larger state. The cases utilized in this research are listed in the Appendix.

Dependent Variables

The Deepening of Freedoms

Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) discovered that in 32 of 67 states studied (nearly 48 percent) those with strong nonviolent civic groups and coalitions at the cusp of transition have seen a strong improvement in their levels of political and civil freedoms many years after their respective democratic transitions. Using the Freedom House scores, Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) measured the cumulative change in freedom by calculating the difference between the combined average of the political and civil liberties score before the year each state transitioned and the average score that each state had in 2005. To test if their results hold true while controlling for other pertinent variables (which they do not account for), I replicate their method of analysis (see Table 1) and find strong evidence that confirms their theoretical expectations.

Institutional Performance

To evaluate institutional performance, I rely on the World Bank's Global Governance Project (Kauffman et al., 2004). The organization provides measures that evaluate each state's level of governance across six dimensions. The extent of democratic consolidation is captured by the first two dimensions: (1) voice and accountability and (2) political stability. The next two measure democratic effectiveness: (3) governmental effectiveness and (4) regulatory quality. The last two represent the fairness and transparency of democratic polities: (5) the rule of law and (6) control of corruption.

The first two dimensions (which focus on the level of political, civil, and human rights and the likelihood of violent threats or changes in government through force or terror) and the last two dimensions (which measure contract enforcement, the quality of law and order, the presence of an independent judiciary, and whether corruption and bribery is pervasive in the polity) obviously comport with what democratization scholars posit as the major elements that should be promoted

in order to protect the long-term viability of democracy (Diamond and Morlino, 2004; Hagopian and Mainwaring, 2005).

The dimensions regarding governmental effectiveness and regulatory quality cover how states protect property rights, the competence of the bureaucracy, the efficiency of public services in the allocation of goods and services, and the promotion of free-trade policies. These two dimensions help identify whether governments have a sound fiscal environment that can facilitate an uninterrupted flow of foreign investment and thereby harness economic growth in the long term.

The measures are derived using a composite aggregation technique by drawing on 25 data sources constructed by 18 different organizations, ranging from the Economist Intelligence Unit and Gallup International to Standard and Poor's DRI. Each state is given a raw score that ranges from –2.5 to +2.5, with higher scores indicating better institutional performance, while lower scores indicate substandard performance (generating an expected value of zero and a standard deviation of one across states). These point estimates provide the best measure yet that can effectively provide a numerical score for the performance of institutions (and are available for more than 100 states). In this study, I use the combined average scores for each state from the years 1996–2004 to gauge the prevailing or predominant institutional performance score over an eight-year period.

Independent Variables

Pre-Transitional Strength of Civil Society

The Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) database provides a new measure for the strength of nonviolent civil society activism for each of the 66 states that have transitioned since the third wave. I utilize this measure as my main independent variable. According to Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005), this measure taps the strength of civic associationalism before each state transitioned to a new regime system.[5]

Using their measure, I create a trichotomous variable that taps the strength of civil society in the pre-transition stage. When a state had a strong civil society, it was coded as three; if it had moderate civil society strength, it was coded as two; and states with weak civil societies or that had no civil society groupings were coded as one. The strength of civil society in the pre-transitional stage for each state is listed in the Appendix.

Clearly, this measure is subject to inherent validity problems. It may underestimate or overestimate the pre-transitional strength ratings of a country because of the historical uniqueness of each case. Indeed, this measure may require stronger inter-coder reliability tests. Further, the measure can overemphasize the activism of civil society in urban areas, while in rural areas there is virtually no mass civil society presence in each case. But thus far, this is the only measure available that can effectively capture pre-transitional civil society strength empirically. Hence regression models presented later must be taken with a note of caution as this relates to problems with the construct validity of the Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) measure.

A Proxy for the Post-Transitional Strength of Civil Society

A strong pre-transitional civil society does not remain so years after transition. In fact, as discovered by Diamond (1999), many civil society groups become

moribund after the ancien régime collapses, primarily because such groups lose their organizational mission after the initial goal of liberalizing the despotic state is achieved. Sometimes the civil society agenda is co-opted by newly democratizing state institutions, and civil society groups lose purpose. Furthermore, it may be argued that the Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) measure is subject to biased coding based on expert ratings that do not truly reflect political realities. To mitigate this deficiency, and to assess the strength of civil society post-transition, I use a measure of the organizational density (per million of the population) and membership density (per million of the population) of NGOs for each state which has data points for both 1991 and 2001 (data derived from Glasius et al., 2002). I use the mean of these figures to create a proxy variable that effectively taps the strength of civil society post-transition.

NGOs, however, assume different types and forms, and some may be more active in demanding state accountability. Furthermore, NGO density may not necessarily capture the strength of civil society per se, and it may signify the persistence of globalization's focus in promoting transnational epistemic communities or neoliberal donor interests. Lastly, transitional states may have a high density of NGOs, but the proportion of NGOs dedicated specifically to promoting economic development or state accountability may be very low. Because of these possibilities, we should therefore be cognizant of this measure's inherent weakness when reading the regression models. What is essential here, however, is that this measure does capture, at least to a certain extent, the degree of civic associationalism in each of the more than 60 transitional states in this cross-national study.

Control Variables

There is a set of standardized control variables that is deemed to affect a state's institutional performance. For instance, La Porta et al. (1998) discovered that English legal origins, Protestantism, ethnic fractionalization, and a socialist past can affect the quality of governmental effectiveness in a cross-sectional study of democratic and nondemocratic states. I employ their dataset to code for these variables. There is also evidence that religious fractionalization can elicit an effect on some indices of the quality of governance (Alessina et al., 2003), and hence I include this as a control.

Gerring and Thacker (2004) also discovered that parliamentarism is a variable that can lessen the entrenchment of corruption, and hence improve institutional performance. Therefore, a state is coded one if it has strong presidentialism, two if it has semi-presidentialism, and three if it has a high degree of parliamentarism. These numerical figures represent the predominant institutional form each state has adopted over the previous two decades based on Gerring and Thacker's coding scheme.

To control for democratic age, I delineate third-wave democracies (states that transitioned between 1974 and 1988) from fourth-wave democracies (states that transitioned during and after 1989). This is in line with the argument that those that transitioned in the fourth wave (mostly post-communist societies) may be at a historical disadvantage in promoting strong civil societies post-transition because the presence of a totalitarian and repressive state restricted the prominence of autonomous groups in shaping group identity (Linz and Stepan, 1996). Thus,

I use a dummy measure by coding fourth-wave states as one (those that transitioned during and after 1989) while coding the rest as zero.

Lastly, to control for the level of economic development, in line with what modernization theory alludes to as the effect of wealth on democracy (see Lipset and Larkin, 2004), I tap the Human Development Index for the year 2003. Since a majority of the more than 60 states in the analysis are mostly developing states, it is better to use the level of economic development rather than economic wealth (GDP per capita) as a control variable that proxies their respective level of development.[6]

Interpretation of Results

The empirical analysis begins by assessing whether the strength of civil society has deepened the civil liberties and political freedoms of transitional citizens. The results in Table 1 indicate that a strong civil society before and after transition is, in fact, strongly correlated with a positive effect on deepening political freedoms and civil liberties. Pre-transitional strength is significant at the $p < .05$ level, while the post-transitional strength of civil society (as measured by both the organizational and membership density of NGOs) is significant at the $p < .01$ level, as illustrated in Models B and C. This confirms essentially the empirical findings of Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005) even when one controls for key societal variables that can elicit an effect on the dependent variable (deepening of freedom).

To begin the multivariate analysis testing of whether Putnam's (1993) thesis has empirical applicability among third-wave and fourth-wave democracies, I proceed by looking at the governance measures that reflect the extent of democratic consolidation – specifically, voice and accountability and political stability. Across the board, the results (shown in Tables 2, 3, 4, and 5) show that the pre-transitional strength and post-transitional density of civil society have a positive and statistically significant influence on the degree of voice and accountability among transitional states. The results convey that states with strong and dense civil societies are more likely to have polities that promote human rights, defend individual rights, and have citizens that are free to participate in political protest. Further, the so-called Berman critique appears not to have any salience in the empirical findings presented: a strong and dense civil society seems to increase political stability among the transitional states. The findings here support the theoretical claim that a strong civil society generates polities that can avoid the domestic political turmoil associated with interventionist militaries and coups (see Hibbs, 1977; Putnam, 1967). In fact, recent research has incorporated the density of NGOs as a measure that can lessen the likelihood of military coups – strong and dense civil societies serve as a "coup-proofing" mechanism that prevents military adventurism (see Belkin and Schofer, 2003). To sum up, both strong pre- and post-transitional civil society associationalism have statistically significant effects in increasing levels of political stability (although post-transitional strength in both organizational and membership density is highly significant at $p < .01$, while pre-transitional strength is only marginally significant at $p < .10$). This means that states with strong and dense civil societies are less likely to experience the likelihood that the government in power will be destabilized or overthrown by possibly unconstitutional or violent means.[7]

TABLE 1. *The Effect of Pre-Transitional and Post-Transitional Civil Society Strength on Deepening Freedoms*

	Model A	Model B	Model C
Strength of civil society activism (pre-transition)	**.6924157**** **(.2886673)**	–	–
NGO organizational density (1991–2001) averaged (post-transition)	–	**.2109187***** **(.0706244)**	–
Membership density (1991–2001) per million population (post-transition)	–	–	**.0030793***** **(.0010368)**
Protestantism	.0184713 (.0148015)	.0269976 (.0175177)	.0063882 (.0246477)
Fourth-wave state	.801401 (.5571075)	**.9544629***** **(.5009748)**	.6739997 (.4790425)
Ethnic heterogeneity	–.365324 (1.066497)	–.4439566 (.8893778)	–.8055534 (.9026684)
Religious fractionalization	.2221633 (1.053743)	–.1245482 (1.179983)	.7567434 (1.270507)
Socialism	–.7927264 (.5876601)	–.7648912 (.5377066)	**–1.246127**** **(.5525924)**
English legal origin	**–1.105592**** **(.5175652)**	**–1.105592**** **(.5175652)**	**–1.356079**** **(.5114924)**
Human Development Index (2003)	2.783009 (1.923422)	2.026788 (1.774102)	1.534694 (1.75547)
Parliamentarism	.3216384 (.2882056)	.3476892 (.3064963)	.4172908 (.2821141)
Constant	–1.853236 (1.448804)	–.3341532 (1.660598)	.2398845 (1.621291)
Number of observations	66	63	64
R-square	.3863	.3871	.3974
F-score	8.91***	7.43***	5.22***

Notes: Significance level: * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests).
**The deepening of freedom variable is calculated by the 2005 combined composite average Freedom House score for each state with its pre-transition score (Karatnycky and Ackerman, 2005). Higher scores illustrate higher degrees of freedoms gained.

We now turn to governance measures that tap the efficacy of state institutional performance. These dependent variables are governmental effectiveness and regulatory quality. The results confirm that the stronger the pre-transitional strength of civil society is, the better states perform in terms of regulatory quality (significant at $p < .10$) and governmental effectiveness (significant at $p < .05$). Likewise, NGO organizational density post-transition is correlated with a positive impact in promoting regulatory quality (significant at $p < .05$) and governmental effectiveness (significant at $p < .01$). This is also mirrored by how NGO membership density is a strong predictor of regulatory quality and governmental effectiveness

Table 2. *The Effect of the Pre-Transitional Strength of Civil Society on Institutional Performance, Independent Variable of Interest: Karatnycky and Ackerman's (2005) Measure*

	Voice and accountability	Regulatory quality	Rule of law	Political stability	Governmental effectiveness	Control of corruption
Strength of civil society (pre-transition)	**.3076708*** (.1069759)**	**.2059534* (.114125)**	**.2374259** (.0939392)**	**.2016413* (.1113498)**	**.1731253** (.0804796)**	**.159858** (.0784091)**
Protestantism	**.0083301* (.0048006)**	.0050002 (.0083103)	**.0080303* (.0047805)**	**.0123342** (.0061206)**	.0036268 (.0048607)	**.0096117** (.0039549)**
Fourth wave	.3003626 (.2267515)	.1435839 (.28904)	–.0185174 (.2079519)	.228113 (.2385035)	–.0500488 (.1807123)	–.1117259 (.1946497)
Ethnic heterogeneity	–.2351874 (.4497338)	.1374094 (.5191561)	–.2554972 (.3888971)	–.2396044 (.5153766)	–.0547776 (.3202348)	–.1020575 (.3763833)
Religious fractionalization	.377473 (.3873715)	.4331694 (.4555172)	.1848358 (.3579696)	–.1481399 (.4840792)	**.5397844* (.2964882)**	.2292979 (.2797155)
Socialism	**–.5593676** (.211816)**	–.2879459 (.2207669)	–.2478542 (.1737004)	–.1512297 (.2221023)	**–.2765161* (.1417919)**	**–.3379579** (.1528716)**
English legal origin	–.2480021 (.2012035)	–.2843271 (.2672542)	–.1254885 (.2100396)	–.0118273 (.2882013)	–.1705303 (.1881467)	–.1917328 (.1548522)

(Table 2 continued)

(Table 2 continued)

	Voice and accountability	Regulatory quality	Rule of law	Political stability	Governmental effectiveness	Control of corruption
Human Development Index (2003)	**2.502792*** (.7124926)**	**2.546212*** (.6515821)**	**1.767874*** (.582806)**	**2.127939** (.8418243)**	**2.245256*** (.5315431)**	**2.102132*** (.4772147)**
Parliamentarism	.1159062 (.0918497)	**.2294034** (.0941872)**	**.1727372** (.0840456)**	.0087418 (.1213424)	**.2052009*** (.0703912)**	**.1326847* (.075077)**
Constant	–2.658241*** (.6266999)	–2.881031*** (.7337995)	–2.192097*** (.5679224)	–2.237558*** (.7965697)	–2.488161*** (.4687648)	–2.188015*** (.4586175)
Number of observations	66	66	66	66	66	66
F-test	9.94***	7.56***	10.61***	4.43***	11.96***	12.50***
R-square	.5395	.64093	.5343	.3302	.6349	.5789

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients are given; robust standard errors are in parentheses. Two-tailed significance tests, * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$. The governance measures are the average composite scores for each rubric of governance for the years 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004 (Kaufmann et al., 2004). Higher scores indicate better performance (ranges from –2.5 to +2.5).

Table 3. *The Effect of the Post-Transitional Strength of Civil Society on Institutional Performance, Independent Variable of Interest: NGO Organizational Density per Million Population*

	Voice and accountability	Regulatory quality	Rule of law	Political stability	Governmental effectiveness	Control of corruption
NGO organizational density (1991–2001) averaged (post-transition)	**.105753*** (.023004)**	**.0546871** (.0242682)**	**.073614*** (.0241963)**	**.0980829*** (.0292755)**	**.0575761*** (.0210511)**	**.0770524*** (.0228901)**
Protestantism	**.0114849** (.0051396)**	.0083842 (.0062182)	**.0101584** (.0041747)**	**.0133717** (.005936)**	.0054832 (.0034917)	**.0099165*** (.0033696)**
Fourth wave	**.3937277* (.2272959)**	.222601 (.3086953)	.0670115 (.2241001)	.3368158 (.246847)	.0232963 (.1954487)	–.0387646 (.1900945)
Ethnic Heterogeneity	–.2912477 (.3770257)	.2085662 (.4880801)	–.2571971 (.3721801)	–.155179 (.4504306)	–.08773 (.325597)	–.1254548 (.3238249)
Religious fractionalization	.2056552 (.3980865)	.1777238 (.42936)	.0133719 (.345062)	–.4073506 (.474615)	.4021019 (.2750624)	.1266597 (.2507694)
Socialism	**–.5149105** (.2057731)**	–.2016907 (.2323309)	–.1640257 (.1945151)	.0082145 (.2213135)	–.2239748 (.1638414)	**–.2616679* (.1471221)**
English legal origin	–.2954545 (.1916569)	–.2759573 (.252871)	–.1455076 (.201055)	–.0278944 (.2728847)	–.1876457 (.1861704)	–.2259245 (.1500246)

(Table 3 continued)

(Table 3 continued)

	Voice and accountability	Regulatory quality	Rule of law	Political stability	Governmental effectiveness	Control of corruption
Human Development Index (2003)	**1.996164**** **(.7547735)**	**2.398726***** **(.7016911)**	**1.422927**** **(.6303903)**	**1.612644**** **(.7989516)**	**1.917587***** **(.5879574)**	**1.625185***** **(.4518156)**
Parliamentarism	.1358072 (.0943874)	**.2421113**** **(.0957949)**	**.2067202**** **(.0796853)**	.005582 (.1088473)	**.2293855***** **(.0692132)**	**.1434483**** **(.0679303)**
Constant	–1.915013** (.7022404)	–2.512061*** (.7335138)	–1.681059** (.6321738)	–1.725237** (.7881331)	–2.066259*** (.5417427)	–1.724046*** (.4721668)
Number of observations	63	63	63	63	63	63
F-test	13.21***	9.63***	16.64***	7.77***	15.55***	19.88***
R-square	.5616	.64729	.5498	.63412	.6451	.6299

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients are given; robust standard errors are in parentheses. Two-tailed significance tests, * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, *** $p < .01$. The governance measures are the average composite scores for each rubric of governance for the years 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004 (Kaufmann et al., 2004). Higher scores indicate better performance (ranges from –2.5 to +2.5).

Table 4. *The Effect of the Post-Transitional Strength of Civil Society on Institutional Performance, Independent Variable of Interest: NGO Membership Density per Million Population*

	Voice and accountability	Regulatory quality	Rule of law	Political stability	Governmental effectiveness	Control of corruption
NGO membership density (1991–2001) averaged (post-transition)	**.0015008*** (.0003678)**	**.0011788*** (.0004001)**	**.0011287*** (.0003071)**	**.0015505*** (.0003983)**	**.0007937*** (.0002701)**	**.0011453*** (.0002619)**
Protestantism	.0024982 (.0087586)	.001097 (.0069884)	.0046395 (.0068988)	.0050697 (.009645)	.0017059 (.0044934)	.0038484 (.0057234)
Fourth wave	.2526771 (.2151154)	.1325829 (.2925591)	–.0374645 (.2173571)	.1969959 (.2384351)	–.054544 (.1946859)	–.1454723 (.1852901)
Ethnic heterogeneity	–.442953 (.3887884)	.113186 (.4719244)	–.3327187 (.3698007)	–.2745452 (.4500682)	–.1442234 (.3300732)	–.2167684 (.3392459)
Religious fractionalization	.5916902 (.4578084)	.4214028 (.4378111)	.2294336 (.3823765)	–.0834918 (.4969892)	**.5634993* (.2892162)**	.3742247 (.2845204)
Socialism	**–.7648036*** (.2153517)**	–.3683369 (.2370279)	**–.3610349* (.1948494)**	–.2510007 (.2185398)	**–.3692502** (.164971)**	**–.4582739*** (.1493112)**
English legal origin	**–.3618367* (.2073651)**	–.3364939 (.2326284)	–.188105 (.1933572)	–.0922202 (.2547182)	–.2154796 (.1870142)	–.2718866 (.147526)
Human Development Index (2003)	**1.835216** (.7773542)**	**2.078255*** (.7136367)**	**1.334464** (.6019022)**	**1.43081* (.7839391)**	**1.898348*** (.6034011)**	**1.523879*** (.4540031)**
Parliamentarism	**.1522836* (.0888508)**	**.2248238** (.088759)**	**.1871804** (.0834181)**	–.0106505 (.1082992)	**.2207068*** (.0726574)**	**.1358133* (.0740461)**
Constant	–1.656123** (.7123008)	–2.20936*** (.7162372)	–1.478771** (.6188314)	–1.429585* (.7812988)	–1.944941*** (.562613)	–1.522039*** (.4850673)
Number of Observations	64	64	64	64	64	64
F-test	9.59***	11.65***	9.52***	5.12***	19.11***	12.00
R-square	.5636	.5039	.5425	.4244	.6317	.6289

Notes: Unstandardized coefficients are given; robust standard errors are in parentheses. Two-tailed significance tests, * $p < .10$, ** $p < .05$, ***$p < .01$. The governance measures are the average composite scores for each rubric of governance for the years 1996, 1998, 2000, 2002, and 2004 (Kaufmann et al., 2004). Higher scores indicate better performance (ranges from –2.5 to +2.5).

TABLE 5. *Summary Statistics*

Variable name	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Pre-transitional civil society strength	2.223881	.8315902	1	3
NGO membership density	179.9785	221.5536	8.2	1107.7
NGO organizational density	2.34375	2.919441	0	13.7
Protestantism	6.618182	11.896	0	66
Fourth wave	.7910448	.4096308	0	1
Ethnic fractionalization	.4624104	.2348949	.002	.9302
Religious fractionalization	.4133104	.225173	.0049	.8603
Socialism	.4029851	.4941997	0	1
English legal origin	.1641791	.3732338	0	1
Parliamentarism	1.58209	.8375515	1	3
Human Development Index	.7018657	.1615426	.333	.928
Voice and accountability	.0431343	.7966049	–1.75	1.31
Political stability	–.260597	.7598004	–1.86	1.06
Governmental effectiveness	–1.632836	.6607374	–1.20	1.29
Regulatory quality	–.537313	.8232011	–2.15	1.62
Rule of law	–.2755224	.693955	–1.53	1.16
Control of corruption	–.2920896	.6429372	–1.21	1.45

(both significant at $p < .01$). This largely confirms the theoretical position of Putnam (1993), who agued that civic associationalism makes state institutions work better. The results show that strong civil societies appear to promote an increased quality of public service provision, improve the competence of civil servants, assure the implementation of the majority party's proposals for good governance, guard the independence of the civil service from political pressure, and prohibit excessive regulation of private industries and businesses.

The last set of governance measures looks at the fairness and transparency of state institutions. The rule-of-law measure concerns expert assessments on the effectiveness of an independent judiciary that is capable of making decisions without the interference of an overbearing executive branch. The results confirm that states with strong pre-transitional civil societies are more likely to score better on the rule-of-law measure (significant at $p < .05$) and the control-of-corruption score (significant at $p < .05$). Furthermore, post-transitional strength of civil society both in the form of organizational and membership density also has a positive effect on the degree of rule-of-law entrenchment (both significant at $p < .01$) and the control of corruption (both significant at $p < .01$). The results show that although both pre- and post-transitional strength of civil society matter, post-transitional strength, as a reflection of NGO organizational and membership density, seems to have a stronger impact in promoting fair, transparent, effective, and accountable state institutions.

Conclusion: Theoretical Implications of Results

Despite the critiques mounted against neo-Tocquevilleans, the findings here demonstrate that across the board a strong civil society is not only likely to deepen the degree of freedoms gained by citizens post-transition, but also to lessen state corruption, promote the rule of law, and establish greater governmental effectiveness because it counterbalances, challenges, devolves, and decentralizes state power to make it more accountable in the eyes of the public and responsive to citizen demands (Taylor, 1990).

Through what mechanisms does this occur? States with a strong civil society presence often focus on sustaining the complexity and pluralism of their societal groups, which leads NGOs to experience both vertical and horizontal growth. Diamond (1999) calls this phenomenon the ability of national-level NGOs to organize life parochially, in other words, to organize provincial, local, or regional chapters for total mass action. Such NGO expansion to the regions, provinces, and municipalities is good for democracy because it brings citizens together in face-to-face interactions, where they can discuss and deliberate on the shortcomings of local and national governments. The diffusion of NGOs to the local level is crucial to promote accountability checks on the government because the whole nation (and not just the capital region or urban areas) is involved in assessing state performance and governmental malfeasance. In the end, states with very dense and diffused NGOs are better geared to make effective demands on the polity as a whole.

States with strong and dense civil societies may also promote regulatory quality and the efficacy of state-bureaucratic management because autonomous groups can provide state elites with the proper counsel and advice on authentic social problems that confront the daily lives and everyday activities of mass citizenries. This is especially true in Eastern European fourth-wave democracies, as confirmed in thick case-study descriptions in which civil society is seen as synonymous with promoting direct democracy at the grass roots (see Bernhard, 1993; Cohen and Arato, 1992; Keane, 1998; Kolankiewicz, 1992). Organizationally, a strong civil society presents state authorities with a reliable and constant stream of information on how the state can perform in greater accord with mass public expectations, permitting the state to draw up actionable and manageable plans of action for better performance (see Schmitter, 1993).

One notable finding in this article is the discovery of how states with strong civil societies experience higher levels of political stability, even among those that are ethnically and religiously fractionalized. This in a sense validates the findings of Varshney (2001, 2002) in India, where interethnic associational networks of civic engagement have inherent peace-inducing effects. I advance here the theoretical position that density in NGO activity can promote interethnic contact among ethnically or religiously divided transitional citizens and thereby dilute intra-group nationalism. In the end, dense NGO networks promote an increased level of interethnic contact that can promote interethnic tolerance.

The results on corruption also corroborate a World Bank (2000) report stating that strong civil society institutions can effectively challenge state-level corruption. The report states that civil society groups can facilitate the formation of political action committees with the purpose of combating head-on illegal governmental activities such as bribery, kickbacks, and uncompetitive bidding in a state's sale of public utilities or national industries (see World Bank, 2000: 44–7).

Although scholars in the past have associated associational life mostly through the specific contours of membership in voluntary associations (see Armony, 2004), the major theoretical implication of this study is that NGO organizational and membership density can facilitate better institutional performance. What accounts for this phenomenon? How is this done?

I argue that states with a dense NGO presence can train democratic citizens in the virtues of civility, such as toleration, cooperation, and reciprocity. Despite pronounced cleavages (religious or ethnic), NGOs in different sectors can bridge the differences between transitional citizens with different backgrounds as they learn to coexist in the public sphere and concomitantly develop higher levels of trust. Furthermore, high NGO organizational and membership density can contribute to effective and meaningful social collaboration that lessens ideological polarization and the rigidities of social conflict. Such social collaboration is a crucial edifice which can strengthen the role of private citizens in holding their leaders and officials accountable to measurable standards and yardstick assessments that can improve state institutional performance.

In a related vein, states with a highly dense NGO presence also have the capacity to invite foreign foundations, think tanks, international policy networks, and solidarity groups into their nations to monitor their state's performance as it relates to democratic state building. Naturally, these outside groups contribute to the financial viability of locally based NGOs, specifically those oriented toward creating newer forms of civil society groups, monitoring the fairness of elections, the preservation of civil liberties, the maintenance of an independent judiciary, the monitoring of human rights abuses, the protection of (indigenous) minorities, and the promotion of the protection of property rights. States with very sparse NGO organizational or membership density tend not to attract these international groups and donors, and hence may continue to have institutional deficits that seriously impede democratic institutional performance.

Appendix

TABLE A1. *Nation-States Included, Year of Transition and Pre-Transitional Strength of Civil Society*

State	Year of transition	Strength
Albania	1990	2
Argentina	1982	2
Armenia	1989	2
Azerbaijan	1989	3
Bangladesh	1990	3
Belarus	1989	2
Benin	1990	3
Bolivia	1983	3
Bosnia	1995	1
Brazil	1985	3
Bulgaria	1989	3
Cambodia	1991	1
Cape Verde	1991	1
Chile	1988	3
Croatia	1999	2
Czech Republic	1988	3
El Salvador	1992	1

(TABLE A1 continued)

(TABLE A1 continued)

State	Year of transition	Strength
Estonia	1989	3
Ethiopia	1991	1
Gambia	2001	1
Ghana	2000	2
Greece	1974	3
Guatemala	1996	1
Guyana	1990	2
Hungary	1989	3
Indonesia	1998	3
Kazakhstan	1989	1
Kyrgyzstan	1989	1
Latvia	1989	3
Lithuania	1989	3
Macedonia	1990	1
Madagascar	1990	3
Malawi	1992	3
Mali	1991	3
Mexico	2000	2
Moldova	1989	2
Mongolia	1990	3
Mozambique	1992	1
Nepal	1990	2
Nicaragua	1990	3
Nigeria	1998	2
Panama	1989	1
Paraguay	1989	1
Peru	2000	3
Philippines	1986	3
Poland	1989	3
Portugal	1974	3
Romania	1989	2
Russia	1989	2
Senegal	2000	2
Serbia	2000	3
Slovakia	1989	3
Slovenia	1989	3
South Africa	1990	3
South Korea	1990	3
Spain	1987	3
Taiwan	1975	2
Tajikistan	1992	1
Tanzania	1989	2
Thailand	1992	3
Turkey	1981	2
Uganda	1985	1
Uruguay	1984	3
Uzbekistan	1989	1
Zambia	1990	3
Zimbabwe	1976	1

Notes

1. Armony (2004) classifies voluntary associational groups along two dimensions. One is through Putnam's (1993) use of soccer leagues, birdwatching clubs, youth groups, and cultural associations; the other is Olson's (1982) conceptualization of political parties and labor guilds.
2. Seligson (2002), for instance, asserts that cross-national research using the World Values Surveys (claiming the link between aggregate-level mass values and democratic support) may suffer from the methodological weakness of attributing individual-level characteristics based on aggregate group statistics.
3. See Robert Putnam's others works (1995a, 1995b) that dwell on the topic of civic associationalism's erosion in the USA and how this may affect the nation's sense of democratic citizenship.
4. Berman (2003) has recently written a piece demonstrating how Islamism may flourish in Arab states that have vibrant associational communities yet weak levels of state institutionalization.
5. Karatnycky and Ackerman (2005: 48) classify each state as either having:

   (1) "Strong" civil society activism – which refers to the presence of a powerful, cohesive leading civic umbrella coalition that adheres to nonviolent forms of civic resistance.
   (2) "Moderate" civil society activism – refers to civic forces that have considerable membership strength, but whose influence is weakened by (1) a lack of unity represented by multiple groupings rather than a single broad-based coalition; (2) the presence of rival civic forces that reject nonviolent action and employ violent force in their struggle; and (3) settings in which there are some active civic groupings, but these groupings do not have significant mass membership support.
   (3) "Weak or Absent" civil society activism – refers to a weak civic infrastructure, the absence of a significant civic coalition and the absence of even modest mass support.

6. In order to ensure that economic wealth does not substantially change the OLS regression results of this study, I run a separate model substituting the Human Development Index for 2003 with the GDP per capita of each state (in natural logarithm form) for both 1995 and 2002. The alternative models (not shown for space reasons) with the inclusion of logged GDP per capita as a control variable still produce statistical significance for the independent variables of interest (civil society strength pre-transition and NGO organizational and membership density post-transition) ranging from $p < .10$ and $p < .01$, respectively. Results are available upon request from the author.
7. For the methodology of the political stability score, see Kauffman et al. (2004).

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