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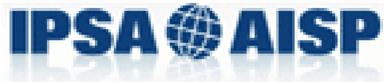

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Abstract

A number of societal and institutional factors enhance the development of a vibrant civil society, such as a country's socioeconomic traditions and societal structure, political institutions, or foreign influence. But the question of which one of these factors contributes most to a vibrant civil society still remains unanswered. Using ordinary least square techniques, this article statistically tests the competing factors with a large-*N* design that includes 42 countries. Our dependent variable is the new Civil Society Index, composed of a structural and a value dimension of civil society. The results show that a country's quality of political institutions and a high degree of religious fragmentation have the strongest impact on the development of a vibrant civil society. In order to examine the causal relationship, we reassess our findings by conducting two case studies on Chile and Russia. The case studies corroborate the causal direction from the quality of political institutions to a stronger civil society.

Keywords

civil society, political institutions, indicator, causality, Chile, Russia, OLS

Introduction

Since the mid-1980s, the concept of civil society has made a dramatic reentry into the social science and global policy discourse. Together with the closely related concept of social capital, it is widely regarded as a powerful force for fostering democracy, good governance, sustainable and equitable development, and social cohesion (Diamond, 1994; White, 1994). The term also figures prominently in critical approaches to civil society (Howell and Pearce, 2002). Accordingly, most of the empirical work to date has focused on examining civil society's ability to fulfill the above functions. Many expectations concerning civil society's potential have had to be toned down, or even rejected as a result, but its relevance to democracy and development remains undisputed (Fisher, 1998; Putnam, 2000). However, if civil society is indeed such a crucial component of

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democratic, equitable, and cohesive societies, then it is important to explore the factors that make civil society such a potent force. Most grand theories in the social sciences have addressed this question, but empirical social scientists have largely neglected this area. Recent years have seen a significant increase in the number of empirical studies on this topic (Anderson and Paskeviciute, 2006; Freitag, 2006; Howard, 2003; Putnam, 2000; Salamon and Anheier, 1998; Schofer and Longhofer, 2005), yet few comparative analyses have tested the various competing explanations as to why civil society is indeed such an important factor. This article thus seeks to fill that knowledge gap and to shed some light on what makes for a strong civil society – an issue that has important implications for public policy and democratic theory alike.

The literature mentions a variety of causal channels through which civil society is enhanced. A first building block points to a country's socioeconomic development (for example, Howell and Pearce, 2002). A second argument emphasizes the role of a country's societal structure in the development of a civil society (that is, cultural, sociopolitical and religious traditions, ethnic composition, and dominant modes of interaction) as well as the spread of trust (Putnam et al., 1993). A third line of reasoning contends that the quality of a country's political institutions is crucial in shaping its civil society (for example, Hadenius and Uggla, 1996). Finally, international influences are also said to have a strong impact, as countries increasingly integrate into the global system and thus become exposed to the diffusion of global civil society values and norms. These four building blocks can be grouped into bottom-up approaches (socioeconomic development and societal structures) and into top-down approaches (political institutions and international influences). But which of these approaches exerts the strongest influence on the strength of a civil society? There have thus far been no large-*N* comparative studies to answer this question.

The aim of our study is to provide a comprehensive test of these competing explanations. As a measure of the strength of civil society we use the new Civil Society Index (CSI) (Heinrich and Fioramonti, 2007), which for our purposes has the advantage that it is available for 49 countries and territories, and that it assesses civil society's strength on two crucial dimensions: its infrastructure and its values. We use a variety of independent variables pertaining to each building block. Our results show that a country's political quality and high level of religious heterogeneity (but not ethnic heterogeneity) are conducive to a vibrant civil society. We find no support, however, for democratic traditions or international influences as factors affecting a country's level of civil society, and only weak support for the role of societal trust. An obvious problem of our cross-sectional study is the difficulty of identifying causal relations. Therefore, in order to verify the causal direction of our strongest finding (the impact of political quality on civil society), we reassess the importance of our political quality variable by analyzing the recent development of civil society in Chile and Russia, two countries that are similar in terms of important control variables, but dissimilar in their level of both civil society strength and political quality. The case studies corroborate our central finding that causality runs from political quality to civil society.

Explaining civil society: Overview of competing theories

Since civil society, as the sphere of autonomous citizen action that lies outside of the state and the market, is located at the heart of a democratic society, it is hardly surprising that most strands of theoretical political science touch on the issue. Indeed, recent years have witnessed the emergence of a vibrant debate on the subject, particularly between approaches highlighting societal factors and those emphasizing the impact of political institutions in relation to civil society.

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Socioeconomic development

Classical modernization theory postulates that the more advanced a country's socioeconomic development, the stronger its civil society. This notion is predicated on the assumption that development leads to the growth of the middle class and promotes modern forms of social integration – factors that, in turn, serve as key drivers of a vibrant civil society (Howell and Pearce, 2002; Lipset, 1959). A strong middle class, for example, provides the material resources and is a fertile ground for skills that are conducive for engagement in social activities. Recent developments in modernization theory, particularly human development theory, have yielded more complex models that suggest economic, institutional, and cultural factors to enhance people's capabilities and opportunities to act freely (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005). These capabilities, in turn, are argued to be supportive of the development of a strong civil society.

Societal structure

Approaches rooted in the societal structure paradigm eschew socioeconomic inquiries and instead focus on cultural traditions and legacies, such as a country's dominant mode of social interaction, its ethnic and religious composition, and its sociopolitical traditions (for example, colonial experience or the experience of communism). The most prominent proponent of this line of argument is Robert Putnam, whose 'bottom-up' approach contends that a country's historical pattern of civic engagement and the spread of social trust impact on the development of a vibrant civil society in the present (Putnam et al., 1993). Huntington (1992) makes a similar argument in this area, asserting that a country's 'civilizational' background, in particular its religious outlook, has important bearings on its ability to sustain a democracy and to develop a vibrant civil society. Others have pointed out the negative effects of social heterogeneity, arguing that this decreases a country's prospects for a strong civil society (Costa and Kahn, 2004). However, Anderson and Paskeviciute (2006) qualify this finding by distinguishing between linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity, and their different effects in more or less established democracies. They are able to show that in less established democracies with linguistic and ethnic heterogeneity citizens are more politically interested and motivated to join voluntary associations. This may be because citizens wish to gain or protect benefits for their group, and are thus psychologically more motivated to get involved both socially and politically (Anderson and Paskeviciute, 2006). James (1989) demonstrates a similar effect by arguing that the more dispersed peoples' preferences are, the greater the economic resources not accommodated by government services, which in turn leads to a growth of the nonprofit sector providing quasi-public goods.

Recent studies comparing the strength of post-communist civil societies with those in post-authoritarian and western countries have highlighted the impact of a country's experience of communism for its political culture and the prospects for its civil society (Howard, 2003). This is believed to be relevant since it shapes the political culture of a country via a long-term experience with a specific political regime. In the case of communism, for example, it is argued that this has led to general mistrust toward civic engagement and social collaboration within society. Conversely the length of democratic experience is said to be positively correlated with participation in voluntary associations, since these associations need time to develop (Curtis et al., 2001). More specifically, different state traditions are shown to influence the degree of associational involvement, with statism having a deterrent effect on new social movement activities since bureaucratic elites and state structures impede and control the development of new associations (Schofer and Fourcade-Gourinchas, 2001).

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Political institutions

In stark contrast to the bottom-up arguments presented, institutionalist scholars adopt a 'top-down' perspective, maintaining that it is the key characteristics of a country's political context that are crucial in shaping its civil society. Here, two different strands can be distinguished. First, historical institutionalism emphasizes path-dependent relationships between the key processes in and structures of a country's history (for example, organized religion and the emergence of different types of welfare regimes (Kääriäinen and Lehtonen, 2006)) and the size and shape of contemporary civil society (Salamon and Anheier, 1998). Second, there are approaches claiming that the current political environment (that is, the quality of democracy, the effectiveness of the state, and the extent of the rule of law) represents the bedrock conditions for the growth of civil society (Hadenius and Uggla, 1996). In liberal democracies, for example, people are believed to have more chance of joining groups that enable them to 'get connected' (Bollen, 1993). Thus, in societies with higher levels of political democracy, citizens volunteer more and actively participate in nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) because they have the opportunity of doing so and because the importance of volunteering is actively emphasized in these countries (Parboteeah et al., 2004). Consequently, it can be said that democratic regimes and civil liberties foster the development of international NGOs; and therefore that stable social environments with few constraints on NGOs are fertile grounds for civil society, and are best provided in the context of long-term democracies (Curtis et al., 2001). Ruiter and De Graaf (2006) found the opposite, however, explaining more volunteerism in less democratic societies by pointing out that citizens often have to provide public goods, because welfare state mechanisms are weaker.

A number of studies support this institution-centered view that strong welfare states with a stable political system and functioning administration promote the development of social capital rather than prevent it, and that the 'crowding out' of people's initiative does not seem to take place (Kääriäinen and Lehtonen, 2006; Van Oorschot and Arts, 2005; Van Oorschot and Finsveen, 2010). Heller (1997) attributes an even stronger effect to institutions and shows in his case study how a vivid and functioning labor movement was actively fostered and institutionalized by the state in Kerala, India. Similarly, Fox (1997: 140) illustrates for the case of oppressive states (for example, Mexico) how the promotion of civil society by the state may motivate people to become engaged, because this serves to reduce their fear of potential consequences for participating in social action.

International influences

World system scholars interested in the effects of globalization argue that current global processes lead to the diffusion of dominant cultural frames, values, and resources to nation-states (Schofer and Longhofer, 2005). Here, the integration of domestic civil society into global society is a crucial indicator. A slightly different argument examines the influence of the aid system and seeks to understand the extent to which civil society can be strengthened through international development assistance (Biekart, 1999).

Intense debate has sprung up among scholars, particularly between proponents of Putnam's bottom-up approach (rooted in political culture) and Skocpol's top-down perspective (focusing on political institutions). This has brought significant attention to the factors that drive the growth of civil society in the USA, for instance (Putnam, 2000; Skocpol, 2003). But cross-national comparative studies on the relative impact of these competing theories and their hypotheses have been rare. The few existing studies have yielded inconclusive and sometimes even contradictory results – alternately emphasizing the importance of a nation's previous regime type (Howard, 2003), the

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world system (Schofer and Longhofer, 2005), current institutional arrangements (Freitag, 2006), and societal characteristics (Anderson and Paskeviciute, 2006).

A primary reason for the disparate results lies in the theorists' different conceptualizations of civil society, these ranging from individual attitudes (for example, generalized trust), individual behavior (for example, turnout in referenda and membership of voluntary organizations), and organizational data (for example, the number of organizations in a country) to sectoral characteristics at the macro-level (for example, the number of employees in civil society organizations expressed as a share of the total labor force of a country). In the following section, we test the competing hypotheses, employing information from the CSI dataset to measure the strength of civil society.

Data and methods

In recent years, it has become commonplace for social scientists to bemoan the 'fuzziness' and complexity of the concept of civil society – particularly in empirical assessments (Chandhoke, 2001; Muukkonen, 2009; O'Connell, 2000). The lack of a commonly agreed-upon definition for the term, and its strongly context-driven nature, make it a difficult subject to examine through comparative empirical work. There is, for example, a growing consensus that civil society should be treated as a specific component, rather than a property, of society. Now, it is conceptualized as an arena for any type of collective action outside the state, the market, or the family. Indeed, the empirical boundaries of civil society have become broader. Civil society encompasses two key components: the structural features of associational life (the extent of citizen participation and the distribution of civil society organizations) and the 'cultural' values these organizations express (Anheier, 2001; Heinrich, 2005).

The research undertaken by the CIVICUS Civil Society Index Project offers a comprehensive survey of civil society's structure and values. The CSI is a quantitative index that describes the 'strength of civil society' based on the responses of experts from national-level advisory boards. Each of the countries included in the CSI was studied through a combination of methods (secondary data reviews, stakeholder consultations, population surveys, media reviews, and desk studies), undertaken to gather the information necessary for scoring each of the indicators on a scale between zero and three, according to qualitatively defined benchmarks. Aggregations of these numbers into dimensions and sub-dimensions were then used to form the structure and values dimensions of the indicator respectively. Subsequently these indicators were presented to national advisory boards composed of civil society representatives, who discussed the indicators in a citizen-jury format and also carried out the scoring of the dimensions. The data were collected between 2004 and 2006, and are currently available for 49 countries and territories.[1]

The combination of the four dimensions is achieved through the so-called 'CIVICUS Diamond', which consists of measurements for the structure, values, environment, and impact of civil society. We opt for the two dimensions of structure and values since these most closely represent the dominant definition of civil society. Moreover, since the dimensions of environment and impact are particularly difficult to measure, we found that we obtained more reliable measurements by relying on structure and values only. We sum the scores of the CSI structure and values dimensions to construct an additive index. Although other approaches for combining these two dimensions are possible (for example, factor analysis or a multiplicative index), we employ a simple additive index to make the results as easily interpretable as possible, thereby avoiding any complex assumptions about their relationship.

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Twenty-one indicators in total have been summarized to form the six sub-dimensions that are used to describe the structure of civil society: breadth of citizen participation, depth of citizen participation, diversity within civil society, level of organization, interrelations, and resources. The values dimension includes fourteen indicators by which the seven sub-dimensions of values are measured: democracy, transparency, tolerance, nonviolence, gender equity, poverty eradication, and environmental sustainability. Since the CSI assesses the extent to which civil society's structure and values conform to a specified ideal type, the data can serve as a measure of civil society's internal strength, defined as its capacity to contribute to democracy and development. In other words, the higher the scores for structure and values, the stronger civil society is in terms of both its makeup and activism. The scores of the dependent variable for each country in the dataset are listed in Appendix Table A1. We acknowledge that there are also problematic aspects about the CIVICUS index. In particular, Biekart (2008) criticizes it on the grounds that a participatory approach in which local experts provide estimates for a quantitative index, might lead to distorted measurements. Moreover, these experts might also have held different concepts of civil society. Nevertheless, we use this index since it is one of the most extensive measurements of civil society. Also, even if the index is subject to nonsystematic measurement error, this would not translate into biased results, only into less efficient results.

There are several other civil society indices available, each with a slightly different theoretical focus. In the absence of a unified definition of civil society, we expect the indices to correlate only weakly. Indeed, as we posit that the CSI most directly measures the *strength* of civil society, there should be weak correlations between the CSI and other measurements of civil society. The more widely used indices are the United States Agency for International Development's NGO Sustainability Index for post-communist Europe and Eurasia (USAID, 2006), the Global Civil Society Index developed by the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project at Johns Hopkins University (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2004), the Global Civil Society Index from the London School of Economics (Anheier and Stares, 2002), which measures the extent to which a country's civil society participates in global civil society, Marc Howard's measure of organizational memberships (Howard, 2003), and Pippa Norris's Social Capital Index (Norris, 2002). The pairwise correlations are shown in Appendix Table A2. As expected, the CSI's correlations with the indices are moderate, that is, between 0.47 (with Norris's Social Capital Index) and –0.64 (with the United States Agency for International Development's NGO Sustainability Index). Because of this, we are confident that the CSI is a viable source for the empirical measurement of the phenomena under scrutiny.

Civil society's strength around the world

The descriptive findings of the CSI demonstrate a clear trend in that the composite measure of civil society's strength is highest for Western Europe, followed by Asia, post-communist Europe, and Latin America (with Chile being an outlier), while it is lowest for Africa, albeit with high variance (see Figure 1). These findings are generally in line with previous research on this topic (Salamon and Sokolowski, 2004; Schofer and Longhofer, 2005). The strong performance of certain post-communist countries (a phenomenon not reported in previous research) may likely be a consequence of our multidimensional measure of civil society, which goes beyond levels of civic engagement. However, it may equally be the result of recent trends toward a more vibrant civil society, partially as a consequence of accession to the European Union (Howard, 2003; Petrova and Tarrow, 2007). Notably, Figure 1 also sheds light on the intra-regional variance of scores. Indeed,

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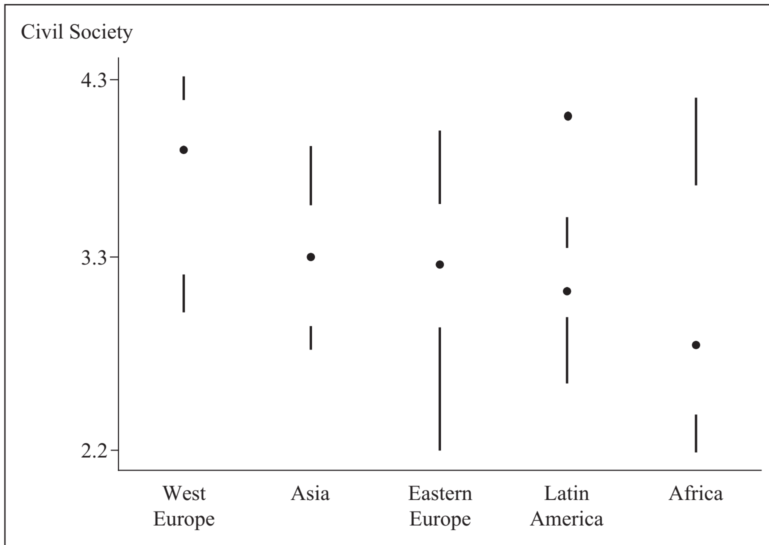

Figure 1. Box Plots of Civil Society Scores by Region.

as mentioned above, there is much more variance in sub-Saharan Africa's civil society than, for example, in Asia or Latin America.

However, intra-regional variation is strong in general, suggesting that other forces in addition to regional characteristics must be at work in shaping civil society. These political, social, and economic factors are explored in the next section.

Empirical assessment: Determinants of civil society

In order to identify the model that best predicts the strength of a country's civil society, we test a number of multivariate models based on the various theoretical hypotheses described above. For explanatory variables, we use the Human Development Index to control for a country's level of socioeconomic development (Heston et al., 2002). A country's political institutions are measured by the duration of its current political regime in years, its level of democracy (Marshall and Jaggers, 2002), and the quality of its political apparatus (Kaufmann et al., 2006). The latter is in the form of an additive composite index that encompasses regulatory quality, the rule of law, control of corruption, government effectiveness, and political stability, with each factor weighted by its respective factor loading.[2] Political quality, in this case, is thus a measure of predictability, arbitrariness, and level of transparency in a country's policy-making. In order to cross-validate the role of political quality, we use the Indicator of Quality of Government as a second variable. This is taken from the International Country Risk Guide (ICRG), and represents the mean value of the variables corruption, bureaucracy quality, and law and order (Teorell et al., 2010). In addition to these variables, we use a dummy variable for post-Soviet countries in order to assess the effect of historical regime legacies.

The role played by societal structure is estimated on the basis of the level of trust, taken from the World Values Survey and measured as a percentage of people trusting other people (World

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Values Association, 2009), as well as on the basis of the ethnic and religious fragmentation present in a society (Alesina et al., 2003). Finally, in order to estimate the international environment's role, we use a country's openness to trade, employing its trade quotient and the amount of foreign direct investment (FDI) as a percentage of GDP (World Bank, 2010).[3] The density of international NGOs might also provide information about a country's integration into the global civil society structure, but since this is coded after the level of the CIVICUS index was measured, the variable is subject to post-treatment bias, and thus we refrain from using it. Appendix Tables A3 and A4 show, respectively, the summary statistics and bivariate correlations based on these measures.

We use ordinary least square (OLS) estimations with robust standard errors for our analysis. Table 1 presents seven models that test various theoretical building blocks of civil society development. Models 1–6 do not include all independent variables, as some of them are correlated with each other. Model 7, in contrast, tests all variables together.

The first model estimates the impact of socioeconomic development and political institutions on civil society. As Table 1 suggests, it is difficult to assess the precise impact of human development on civil society since the variable correlates strongly with most of the other independent variables. In Model 1, for example, human development co-varies with democracy, and in Model 3 with political quality (see Appendix Table A4). But removing the human development variable would possibly lead to omitted variable bias. Therefore, we retain human development in all models, even though this slightly increases their multicollinearity.[4] The variable switches its sign in Model 4 and has high standard errors in all models. Thus, the strongest statement we can make on the role of human development is that the level of human development corresponds with higher levels of civil society.

Models 1–4 in Table 1 test our variables concerning political institutions. They suggest that the variable for regime durability lacks robustness, as it switches signs in Model 2. Democracy is positively, albeit only weakly, linked to the level of civil society. For instance, its coefficient suggests that a change from the lowest to the highest value of democracy increases the level of civil society by only 0.4 points, which is lower than the standard deviation of our dependent variable. In Models 3 and 7, the robust standard error even exceeds the size of the coefficient, which raises concerns about the variable's robustness. This is a striking finding considering that the current academic literature holds democracy to be one of the most basic prerequisites of a vibrant civil society. According to our data, however, this is hardly the case – and this is even more so, bearing in mind that even though democratic countries tend to have vibrant civil societies, there are also non-democracies with high civil society scores, as the cases of Nepal and Uganda show. Model 2 tests for the legacy of socialism, using a dummy for post-socialist countries. The dummy has a negative sign, indicating that the socialist legacy reduces the level of civil society development. However, the magnitude of the variable's effect is weak, as a switch from a non- to a post-socialist country reduces the level of civil society by only 0.23 points, which is smaller than the standard deviation of the level of civil society within the group of post-socialist countries. Thus, we cannot confirm the historical institutionalist hypothesis. Such results are encouraging because they suggest that countries may not be 'stuck' with their historical legacies, and that they may have the chance of developing strong civil societies regardless of their past.

The variable with the strongest and most distinct effect on the strength of civil society appears to be political quality, in Models 3 and 7 – it has a significant effect that is both robust and positive. To cross-validate political quality, we also test the political quality variable provided by the ICRG in Model 4. This also has a positive sign and a similar magnitude of effect to that of our first political quality variable.[5] We thus interpret this as a corroboration of the role of political quality. This is further confirmed by the finding that citizens in political systems with direct

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Table 1. OLS Estimations.

	Models						
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Socioeconomic development							
Human development	.661 (.729)	1.469** (.632)	.066 (.903)	−.260 (.827)	1.836** (.752)	1.264** (.587)	.407 (1.064)
Political institutions							
Political quality (Kaufmann et al., 2006)			.050* (.029)				.064** (.029)
Political quality (ICRG)				1.631* (.702)			
Democracy	.023 (.018)		.010 (.019)	.024 (.017)			.0157 (.019)
Regime durability	.005 (.004)	−.001 (.005)	.001 (.004)	.002 (.004)			.001 (.006)
Post-Soviet		−.238 (.202)					−.081 (.189)
Societal structure							
Trust					1.091*** (.360)		.768 (.458)
Ethnic fragmentation					.662 (.473)		.877 (.438)
Religious fragmentation					.893** (.336)		.976*** (.348)
International influence							
Trade openness						.002 (.003)	.0005 (.003)
Foreign direct investment (log)						−.053 (.059)	−.022 (.051)
Constant	2.614*** (.423)	2.398*** (.364)	3.133*** (.564)	2.401*** (.474)	1.159* (.642)	2.322*** (.445)	1.995** (.807)
N	42	42	42	38	39	41	38
F	2.09	2.23	2.34*	3.34*	4.92**	1.71	5.08***
VIF	1.41	1.49	1.87	1.72	1.59	1.11	2.51
R^2	0.167	0.162	0.232	0.310	0.337	0.151	0.578

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses; * significant at 10 percent; ** significant at 5 percent; *** significant at 1 percent.

democratic elements participate more actively in politics and participate more enthusiastically in voluntary associations (Boehmke and Bowen, 2010). According to this line of argumentation, citizens are more motivated to play a role in society when they feel politically efficacious, which also gives them more confidence in their ability to participate. Ultimately, the disparity in the effectiveness of the democracy variable versus the effectiveness of the political quality variable highlights the insufficiency of merely providing democratic institutions to a people. Rather, democratic governance must be realized in an effective and credible manner in order to promote civil society.

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Model 5 explores the role of societal structure.[6] The variable for trust turns out positive as expected, and is highly significant with a strong effect. Switching from the lowest to the highest level of trust increases the civil society level by 0.85 points, although the magnitude of the effect drops slightly if ethnic fragmentation is taken out of the equation. Another attribute of a country's societal context, religious fragmentation also has a distinct influence on the state of civil society. Indeed, the variable for religious fragmentation is highly significant and, at first sight, unexpectedly positive. Overall, the results indicate that more religiously fragmented countries exhibit stronger civil societies. In order to investigate this effect further, we control for regime type, taking up an idea developed by Anderson and Thompson (2004), who found that the effect of ethnic and linguistic fragmentation on civil society depends on the strength of democracy. We control for the type of regime using a dummy variable as a means of distinguishing between full democracies and weak or non-democracies.[7] However, we are unable to confirm their findings. The sign and magnitude of the variable for religious fragmentation stay robust when we include the dummy, when we estimate subsamples of democracies, and when we estimate a subsample of non-democracies. This might support third-sector scholars, who argue that a heterogeneous society also has a stronger civil society due to the greater diversity of social interests present and the corresponding challenge for the state in catering for all these interests (James, 1987). This finding is thus in line with a recent study by Matsunaga et al. (2010), who show that heterogeneity caused by religious fractionalization increases the size of the nonprofit sector because several demands want to be met.

A similar picture emerges in the case of ethnic fragmentation, the variable for which also has a positive sign with a noticeable effect, although a higher standard error. Also, when we use an alternative coding of ethnic fragmentation, namely that provided by Wimmer et al. (2009), the variable turns out to have a negative sign, indicating that the finding on ethnic fragmentation is not robust and thus requires further and more in-depth exploration. Therefore, it is clear that heterogeneity remains a challenging and complex concept.

In Model 6, we set out to deduce the impact of globalization on the strength of civil society, measured by indicators for international trade and foreign direct investment. Interestingly, we find no strong correlation between foreign direct investment and the vitality of civil society. If at all, the correlation is negative, but the magnitude of the coefficient is small. Exposure to international trade, in contrast, is shown to have a positive effect on civil society, although the result is unstable since the standard errors for this variable are high in Models 6 and 7. Moreover, the coefficient's magnitude is low, it being half the size of the dependent variable's standard deviation. Thus, this could suggest that trade openness might be too rough a proxy for international influences on civil society. Nonetheless, it may not be justifiable to dismiss entirely the impact of foreign influences on civil society based on these estimations. The best variable to further test the relationship is possibly the density of international NGOs, which we cannot use, however, because of post-treatment bias.

In sum, we find strong evidence for the decisive role played by political quality, trust, and religious fragmentation in the development of civil society. All other explanatory variables prove substantially insignificant as they only remotely influence the dependent variable. But do these results hold when we test all covariates simultaneously? In Model 7, we construct a final model, integrating a larger set of covariates. This largely corroborates our previous findings: the variable for political quality has a strong and significant effect, as does that for religious fragmentation. However, the magnitude and significance of our trust variable both drop sharply. As before, democracy and trade openness are shown to be insignificant, both statistically and substantially. Overall, the models' fits are good, with an explained variance of more than 50 percent and significant F-tests. Also, further graphical inspection of the error terms of Model 7 and a Breusch-Pagan test reveal no problems of heteroskedasticity and further tests show that our main results are not driven by country outliers. Our two key findings, thus, are the roles played by the quality of government and by religious fragmentation.

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Based on Model 7, we explore the magnitudes of the effects, running a simulation with CLARIFY (King et al., 2000). Moving from sample minimum to sample maximum, political quality increases the level of civil society by 1.07 points. This change corresponds approximately to a jump in civil society strength from the levels in China to those exhibited by Italy. Moving from the 25th to the 75th percentile improves the level of civil society by 0.46 points, which is similar to the difference in civil society levels in Russia and Guatemala. As there are only 38 cases in Model 7, we reestimate the magnitude of the effect of political quality based on Model 3, which contains the full set of 42 cases. Here, the size of the effect remains the same. Likewise, a change from sample minimum to sample maximum in relation to religious fragmentation increases civil society levels by 0.78 points – roughly the distance between the strength of civil society in Turkey (which has the lowest civil society value in the sample) and in Greece. However, the estimations for religious fragmentation correspond with higher levels of uncertainty, as the 90 percent confidence intervals sometimes overlap. Switching from the 25th to the 75th percentile increases the civil society levels by 0.41, which is similar to the distance between the civil society levels in Honduras and Croatia.

Correlation or causal effect? Russia and Chile in comparative perspective

Based on these correlations, we argue that the main predictors of a strong civil society are political quality and religious fragmentation. Still, this poses the question: is there a causal link between these two independent variables and the strength of civil society? In the case of religious fragmentation it is especially hard to argue in favor of a reversed causal direction. High levels of civil society can hardly be said to spur increased religious fragmentation. But there is no theoretical barrier that precludes a causal effect of civil society on the other key variable: a country's level of civil society could indeed have an effect on a country's political quality. Thus, the causal direction of this latter variable remains uncertain. Since our regression analysis is not able to establish causality with the data at hand, one possible way to test for causality would be to create two samples that are similar in all independent variables except for political quality, on the basis of which this variable's effect could then be assessed. However, the country sample we use prohibits us from creating such treatment and control groups as both groups would be too disparate with respect to control variables. We believe, however, that this problem is independent of our current country selection and that it would be apparent in any large cross-country comparison that included countries with a wide range of development levels.

Therefore, to lend further support to our assertion, we instead undertake a case study in the form of a brief comparison of two countries that are similar in key explanatory variables, with the exception of political quality. We select two pathway cases (that is, cases for which the dependent and the key independent variables vary, but the covariates are similar) as a means of isolating the causal mechanism.

For our purposes, Russia and Chile are sufficiently similar: both changed from autocracies to democracies in the period 1989–92 and they have had similar exposure to international trade (with similar trade quotients in the 30th and 40th percentile), similar levels of religious fragmentation (in the 30th and 40th percentile), similar levels of trust (in the 50th and 40th percentile), and sufficiently similar levels of human development (in the 50th and 70th percentile) (see Table 2). Where they differ sharply, however, is in the matter of political quality. Russia has a political quality score in the 30th percentile, whereas Chile has one in the 90th percentile (equivalent to the 10th and 90th percentile in the ICRG index of quality of government). Therefore, if political quality exerts an effect on civil society, both countries' strengths of civil society should also differ. This is indeed the case: Russia's civil society score is low, that is, in the 10th percentile; Chile's civil society score is

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Table 2. Comparison Between Russia and Chile.

	Russia		Chile	
	Variable value	Percentile	Variable value	Percentile
Dependent variable:				
Civil society	2.6	10th	4.1	90th
Independent variables:				
Political quality (Kaufmann et al., 2006)	−3.2	30th	6.9	90th
Political quality (ICRG)	.33	10th	.75	90th
Control variables				
Human development	.66	50th	.73	70th
Trust	.24	50th	.23	40th
Religious fragmentation	.44	40th	.38	30th
Trade openness	59.7	30th	65.7	40th

high, that is, in the 90th percentile. In the remainder of this section we show how Russia's low political quality has undermined predictability and given rise to an institutional environment in which independent civil society organizations (CSOs) cannot thrive. In Chile, by contrast, the clear and predictable commitment of the government in relation to civil society and the delegation of regulatory tasks to CSOs have laid the foundations for a growing civil society.

Although still somewhat nascent, Russian civil society has largely matured and now plays an increasing role in the country's political and social development. Yet the impact of Russia's unpredictable and opaque political procedures has undermined and damaged its civil society. Perestroika and the fall of the Soviet Union did away with Soviet state-run CSOs, such as women's organizations and trade unions, and gave rise to an embryonic civil society (Sakwa, 2008). In the Soviet era, CSOs first emerged as environmental movements, and an environment minister being appointed as the first non-communist minister clearly shows the potency of their role (Ziegler, 1991). Indeed, environmental groups acquired increasing political clout: in addition to taking on environmental issues, they agitated for democratization and regime change (Crotty, 2009). Similarly, trade unions mushroomed (there were approximately 50,000 in 2005 (Sakwa, 2008: 331)) and the Union of Committees of Soldiers' Mothers emerged as a truly country-wide movement with considerable political impact. Foreign donors, however, heavily financed it (Sundstrom, 2005).

With the rise of President Vladimir Putin and his efforts to restore the state's grip, civil society came under considerable strain. His doctrine of 'sovereign democracy' closed the door for an independent civil society, especially following the various colored revolutions in Eastern Europe, which the Kremlin interpreted as hostile foreign behavior. Dissolving the State Committee for Environmental Protection and the State Committee on Forestry in 2000, Putin took the first steps in tightening state control over environmental issues. In line with this, he put environmental protection under the auspices of the Ministry of Natural Resources, which is responsible for the exploitation of Russia's resource base and often at odds with environmental concerns (Sakwa, 2008: 338). This move thus considerably weakened the autonomy of Russia's environmental movement.

An even more damaging blow to Russia's nascent civil society came in the form of Putin's new registration law for CSOs. Beginning in 1999 in the Yeltsin era, the Law On Public Associations required public organizations to reregister within six months – a mandate that caused many CSOs

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to disappear, either because reregistration was denied or because CSOs failed to meet the stringent new requirements (Crotty, 2009). Indeed, with increased government auditing, a tight time frame, and extensive financial documentation requirements, it became prohibitive for many smaller CSOs to remain in operation (Sakwa, 2008). Overall, it is estimated that the reregistration rate of societal organizations fell below 50 percent in the year 2000 (Mendelson, 2000).

Earlier in his term, Putin had already imposed a new tax on nonprofit organizations, deterring the formation of new CSOs (Sil and Chen, 2004). However, a final attempt to align Russia's civil society with state interests came with the formation of federal and sub-federal Public Chambers in the form of para-constitutional bodies composed of civil society representatives. These succeeded Putin's Civic Forum (Richter, 2009), their primary purpose being to discuss law initiatives and to scrutinize the work of the state administration as a bridge between civil society and the state. The selection process for members of the Public Chambers, however, ensures that the Kremlin's civil society ideals are upheld: Putin appointed the first 42 members of the federal Public Chamber and these deputies then co-opted the remaining seats. Although the Chamber's impact is decidedly limited, it does help to define the boundaries of civil society in Russia by drawing a line between acceptable and unacceptable civil society activities, according to the Kremlin's view. In Richter's words, 'the Public Chamber sought to institutionalize a vision of civil society as a realm without politics, unified behind a unitary state' (Richter, 2009: 61).

This brief overview reveals how state interference has moulded Russia's civil society. There, the state aims to control politically unwanted organizations and even exploits them for its gain. While the state is not seeking to abolish civil society at large, the Kremlin's discriminatory laws and intricate registration requirements combined with arbitrary court decisions, have largely reduced the number of operative civil society organizations as well as discouraged civil engagement more generally.

The Russian state's interference with civil society stands in marked contrast to the situation in Chile, where we find a 'cooperative relationship with government and an enabling socioeconomic context for civil society' (CIVICUS, 2006). This cooperative relationship correlates with the impressively high ratings that Chile has in political quality attributes, such as the rule of law as measured in the World Bank's governance index (superior to 87 percent of countries participating in the study), or corruption as measured by the Corruption Perception Index of Transparency International in 2002 (20th place of 146 countries). Since the democratic restoration of Chile in 1990, state authorities have attempted to improve their relationships with civil society actors. Most recently, these efforts have been coupled with attempts to establish consultation mechanisms and channels for regular dialogue with Chile's citizenry (Cleuren, 2007). These direct means for political participation are weak though, since the political establishment still fears that excessive participation will bring about political instability (Cleuren, 2007). Its attempts to involve Chile's citizens more directly in state decisions are thus accompanied by the Chilean state's ongoing evolution, from a highly centralized interventionist state regime to a more decentralized regime favoring private initiatives and market forces.

In the CIVICUS evaluation of the state of civil society in Chile, the infrastructure of the country's civil society is considered to be moderately strong, despite relatively low levels of citizen participation and limited organizational resources (CIVICUS, 2006). While General Pinochet's dictatorship (1973–89) saw many civil society organizations lose their autonomy or disappear entirely, trade unions, several women's groups, and other similar organizations were instrumental in rallying the opposition movement, leading to a political breakthrough in 1990. The beginning of the democratic regime in the 1990s, with its increased focus on economic growth and free-market thinking, was accompanied by President Patricio Aylwin's conscious efforts to promote local,

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autonomous civic participation (Valdivieso, 2006). From this point onward, the Chilean government has encouraged this shift through its reform of the social sector, placing a large share of social services in the hands of CSOs. Moreover, in some instances the governmental organs and CSOs could successfully work together when reforming the state sector, as in the case of the criminal justice reform (Valdivieso, 2006). These changes have spurred the development of the CSOs, but have at the same time also caused a certain reduction in their political activity (Foweraker, 2001).

In the past 20 years, Chilean civil society has evolved from being grassroots-based to being NGO-based, and it presently hopes to attract more civic participation since it is now dominated by established NGOs. Chilean grassroots movements, on the other hand, have become disjointed in their struggle against the regime, and some of the single-issue movements have lost direction since they now face competition from parties and other interest groups (Foweraker, 2001). This development signifies normalization of the CSOs, a finding which is borne out in Serbin and Fioramonti's (2007:111) study on the development of civil society in Latin America, which suggests that the Chilean state's political and institutional development positively influences civil society since reliable and effective state mechanisms also foster the establishment of NGOs.

The examples of both Russia and Chile thus show how a state's political quality influences the development of civil society. But the results from these short case studies should not be overstated: there is a wide gap in the civil society scores between the two countries and this cannot entirely be accounted for by political quality. Indeed, Chile already had a strong civil society before Pinochet's military coup and it may well be that this legacy has a beneficial effect on Chile's civil society today. Russia, on the other hand, still struggles with the institutional and societal legacies of its communist past, which can be understood to undermine civil society development. Moreover, Chile embarked on a neoliberal development strategy under Pinochet, whereas Russia's economic system remains much more state controlled. Yet, it is also clear from this study that a state's political quality does have non-negligible causal effects on the emergence of a vibrant civil society.

Conclusion

Our analysis reveals that well-functioning political institutions have a strong, positive effect on civil society. This finding lends support to institutionalist approaches claiming that better-governed states, reliable institutions, and the credibility of civil servants and politicians are conducive to the creation of a vibrant civil society. In addition, our analysis also shows that socioeconomic factors have a positive effect. These are highly correlated with the quality of government and indicate that positive developments in politics, economy, and civil society are closely interrelated. Religious fragmentation is highlighted as a further factor that contributes to the emergence of a vibrant civil society. However, the hypotheses of the political culture school, about the 'long arms of history,' cannot be corroborated. Indeed, the strength of contemporary civil society is mostly independent of political legacies. In addition, the influence of social capital (trust) on the strength of civil society is not robust; and finally, international influence is barely shown to have an impact on the development of civil society. Although this latter result needs to undergo more rigorous analysis, as post-treatment bias prevented us from testing the impact of the density of international NGOs. Thus, the key results lend support to the so-called 'top-down approach,' contending that the performance of political institutions is a key factor in fostering a strong civil society, and therefore, in contrast to the 'long arms of history,' our conclusion clearly paints a more positive picture regarding the possibilities for the strengthening of civil society.

Given the data, however, the causal linkage is hard to establish, for a strong civil society is often also seen as an important driving force of good governance and development (Tusalem, 2007).

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Still, we have put forward some evidence that suggests that influence also runs from the quality of a political system to civil society, as our brief case study of civil society in Russia and Chile has corroborated the effect of political quality upon civil society. Civil society thus proves less of a remedy for poor governance than a consequence of governance structures.

These results thus underline the importance of institutions and good governance for the development of a vibrant civil society. However, there might be feedback loops between the quality of political institutions and the strength of civil society, and so, further research should explore these complex interactions in more detail. In particular, there could be a causal link between the welfare state and civil society, as research shows that, in industrialized countries, the welfare state might have an impact on social capital, a concept that is strongly related to civil society (Gesthuizen et al., 2009). Lacking valid measures for the level and type of welfare state for many of our sample countries, we could not test this hypothesis. Also, the strong effect of religious fragmentation is unexpected, and as of yet, we lack convincing explanations. One reason could be that religious groups are highly effective in mobilizing civil societal action, and in religiously heterogeneous societies competition could further increase such mobilization. But why, then, does this not apply to ethnic heterogeneity? Large-*N* comparative research designs should be able to shed more light on these questions.

Appendix

Table A1. Civil Society Score.

Country	Civil society	Structure of civil society	Values of civil society
Germany	4.3	1.8	2.5
Netherlands	4.2	2.1	2.1
Nigeria	4.2	2.0	2.2
Chile	4.1	1.9	2.2
Czech Re-public	4.0	1.7	2.3
Italy	3.9	1.4	2.5
South Korea	3.9	1.6	2.3
Uganda	3.7	1.8	1.9
Croatia	3.6	1.7	1.9
Indonesia	3.6	1.7	1.9
Macedonia	3.6	1.5	2.1
Ukraine	3.6	1.7	1.9
Bolivia	3.5	1.8	1.7
Ghana	3.4	1.4	2.0
Bulgaria	3.3	1.1	2.2
Nepal	3.3	1.6	1.7
Poland	3.3	1.2	2.1
Slovenia	3.3	1.4	1.9
Vietnam	3.3	1.6	1.7
Cyprus	3.2	1.3	1.9
Jamaica	3.2	1.5	1.7
Romania	3.2	1.3	1.9
Argentina	3.1	1.4	1.7

(Continued)

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Table A1. (Continued)

Country	Civil society	Structure of civil society	Values of civil society
Fiji	3.1	1.6	1.5
Georgia	3.1	1.4	1.7
Honduras	3.1	1.2	1.9
Greece	3.0	0.9	2.1
Guatemala	3.0	1.5	1.5
Montenegro	3.0	1.1	1.9
Armenia	2.9	1.6	1.3
Mongolia	2.9	1.2	1.7
Serbia	2.9	1.3	1.6
Uruguay	2.9	1.3	1.6
China	2.8	1.0	1.8
Sierra Leone	2.8	1.3	1.5
Egypt	2.7	1.2	1.5
Ecuador	2.6	1.2	1.4
Russia	2.6	1.1	1.5
Togo	2.4	1.0	1.4
Azerbaijan	2.2	1.9	1.2
Mozambique	2.2	1.1	1.1
Turkey	2.2	0.9	1.3

Table A2. Correlations Between Civil Society Indices.

	CSI	USAID	JHU	LSE	Howard
USAID Sustainability Index	−.643 (11)				
JHU Global Civil Society Index	.487 (8)	1.000 (2)			
LSE Global Civil Society Index	.611 (13)	−.261 (7)	.818 (6)		
Average number of organizational membership (Howard, 2003)	.555 (11)	.0130 (7)	−.064 (3)	.461 (7)	
Social Capital Index (Norris, 2002)	.469 (16)	−.359 (8)	.504 (4)	.228 (9)	.327 (11)

Note: Number of observations shown in parentheses. Civil Society Index (CSI); United States Agency for International Development (USAID); Johns Hopkins University (JHU); London School of Economics (LSE).

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Table A3. Summary Statistics.

Variable	*N*	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min.	Max.
Civil society	42	3.2	0.5	2.2	4.3
Human development	42	.62	.16	.22	.87
Political quality (Kaufmann et al., 2006)	42	−0.53	4.25	−6.97	9.95
Political quality (ICRG)	38	.49	.16	.22	.94
Democracy	42	5.6	5.4	−7	10
Regime durability	42	13.7	15.7	0	56
Post-Soviet countries	42	.36	.48	0	1
Trust	39	.27	.16	.08	.87
Ethnic fragmentation	42	.397	.245	.002	.930
Religious fragmentation	42	.448	.216	.005	.799
Trade openness	42	77.12	27.39	36.28	130.06
Foreign direct investment	41	3.84	3.06	−1.22	12.58

Table A4. Bivariate Correlations.

	Human development	Political quality (Kaufmann et al., 2006)	Political quality (ICRG)	Democracy	Regime durability
Political quality (Kaufmann et al., 2006)	.687				
Political quality (ICRG)	.671	.883			
Democracy	.532	.545	.341		
Regime durability	.302	.400	.401	−.012	
Post-Soviet	.314	−.028	−.036	.184	−.380
Trust	−.240	−.002	.079	−.366	.326
Ethnic fragmentation	−.708	−.624	−.582	−.188	−.480
Religious fragmentation	−.103	−.043	−.037	−.109	.013
Trade openness	.172	.243	.239	.183	.086
Foreign direct investment	.189	.246	.372	.031	.224
	Post-Soviet	Trust	Ethnic fragmentation	Religious fragmentation	Trade openness
Trust	−.348				
Ethnic fragmentation	−.133	.022			
Religious fragmentation	.071	−.024	.218		
Trade openness	.354	−.138	−.150	.274	
Foreign direct investment	.228	−.049	−.191	.259	.437

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Notes

1. Since data for most of the explanatory variables were missing, we eliminate the following countries and territories from our analysis: Taiwan, Lebanon, Scotland, Wales, North Cyprus, Northern Ireland, Hong Kong, and Orissa (India).
2. More specifically, the variable 'political quality' is generated using the following formula: 0.9605 * regulatory quality + 0.9782 * rule of law + 0.9585 * control of corruption + 0.9663 * government effectiveness + 0.8028 * political stability.
3. For each country, we use the average FDI inflow for the years 1998–2002.
4. Multicollinearity, however, remains low in the models. The variance inflation factor (VIF) varies between 1.11 (Model 6) and 1.87 (Model 3). Only Model 7 suffers from higher multicollinearity with a VIF of 2.51.
5. The number of observations for Model 4 is lower due to lack of data for Fiji, Georgia, Macedonia, and Nepal.
6. Data for the level of trust in Togo are missing.
7. A country is considered to be a full democracy if its score on the Polity index (ranging from –10 to +10) is 7 or higher (see Marshall and Jaggers, 2002). Results are not shown in Table 1, but can be obtained from the authors on request.

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