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THE DOWNFALL OF SIMPLICITY
And the Complex Notion(s) of Democratization

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The Downfall of Simplicity

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A Revision of the Relation between Political Society, Civil Society and Democratization

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Introduction[1]

Many articles have been written on democratization, especially in which scholars are concentrated on important factors when looking for democracy. Most of the time the focus lies on the 'pluralist' notion, in which civil society is believed to be the most important stimulus for democratization. Much less, though increasing, attention is paid to the 'critical' notion, in which political society is considered to be the main driver of democratic reform. Recently however, scholars have come to understand that both notions, in which concepts are studied isolated, fall short in explaining democratic transition. Following that insight, researchers have begun to focus on the link between civil and political society within processes of democratization. The relation between both concepts is the core of the 'hybrid' notion.

Although both civil and political society are considered important concepts in processes of democratization, this article holds that all three mentioned notions are (too) simplistic. In reality democratization is more complex and many concepts are involved in the process. This article introduces a fourth notion, called the 'complex' notion, in which attention is given to more (explanatory) variables in relation to each other.

The first part of this article will focus on definitions of relevant concepts. Secondly, the three different notions will be discussed in which the relations between civil society, political society, the state and democratisation will be outlined. The introduction of the 'complex' notion follows after that. At last recommendations for policy makers and for further research will be given.

Definitions

When we speak of civil society, political society, the state, democratization or the democratic transition process, it is not clear from the start what is precisely meant by those terms. In fact, each one of them can be many different things. For the sake of clarity the next part of this article will outline the chosen definitions for some relevant concepts.

Civil Society

'Civil society in its modern conception primarily refers to citizenship and to a distinct 'societal public sphere' of social relations between the family and the state. Civil society can be defined as the totality of social institutions and associations, both formal and informal, that are not strictly production related, governmental or familial in character.

Two interrelated questions seem to be central to the confusion about the concept: what are the properties of civil society, and who belongs to it?' (Biekart 1999: 30). According to White, [civil society is] 'an intermediate associational realm between state and family populated by organizations which

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are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or extend their interest or values' (White 1994: 379). As follows from this definition, civil society is separate from the state, or in other words, in it most pure form it is independent from the state. What is considered 'the state' then?

The State

It is hard to define 'the state' because several things are meant when applying the word. 'Writers who refer to the state often fail to use the term consistently and lack intellectual rigour by merging three concepts. The state as a legal person is a highly abstract fiction. This is easily confused with the concrete concept of a country, with a distinct political system of people sharing common values. Then there is a very dissimilar concept of a state as the apparatus of government. Unfortunately, no standard method exists to handle the ambiguity' (Baylis, Smith & Owens 2008: 333). In this article the state is seen as a sovereign, self-governing, territorially delimited political community/polity (Baylis, Smith & Owens 2008: 23). However, the focus lies on the state as the apparatus of government.

According to the vision of sociologists, civil society is considered separate from the state. The state, from that perspective, is viewed as the government. 'Within traditional International Relations scholarship, civil society is understood to be part of the state' (Baylis, Smith & Owens 2008: 333). Thus, though civil society often is believed to be separate from the state, a relationship between both concepts exists. 'The distinction between the state and civil society cannot always be clearly marked. Civil society thus has to be explained in its relationship with the state and with society more in general' (Biekart 1999: 33).

Political Society

The relationship between civil society and the state can be clarified by adding the notion of 'political society' (Biekart 19 99: 33). 'Political society is a separate sphere of actors and institutions mediating, articulating and institutionalizing the relations between the state and civil society.[2] Political parties are the key institutions of political society. But when their function of mediation and articulation is performed or complemented by other organizations in civil society […] these could also (temporarily) be included in political society' (Biekart 1999: 33). From this notion the conclusion follows that political society is 'an intermediary sphere between the state and civil society' (Biekart 1999: 33). The scheme Biekart introduced is the following:

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[2] Though most of the time political society is regarded as a formal sphere, in this article also (more) informal settings are considered to be political society.

Figure 1 State, civil society and political society (Biekart 1999: 34)
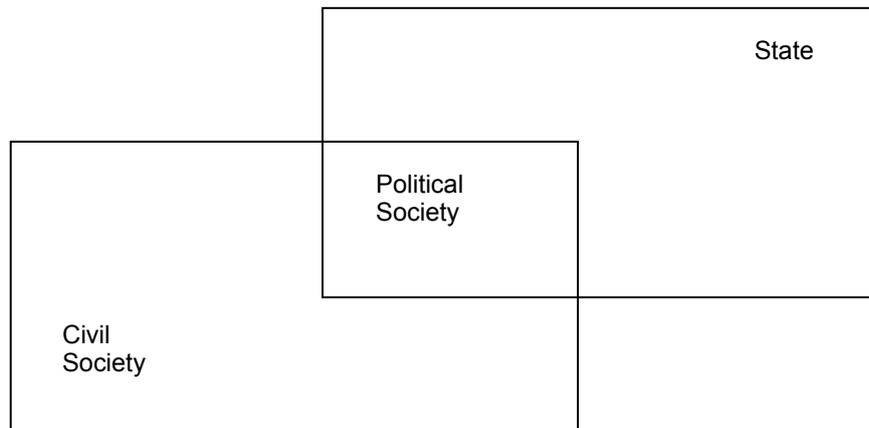
Democracy, Democratization and the Democratic Transition Process

Democracy and democratization are both concepts which are hard to define. 'Democracy itself is a concept that defies precise definition. In social scientific circles the minimalist/formalist delineation is most often adopted, if only for the sake of elegance and the ease of operationalization. In this conventional minimalist definition the criteria of democratisation are regular electoral competitions, usually in a multiparty political system, and thus governmental succession by constitutional, electoral procedures, guaranteeing the rule of law. By contrast, a maximalist socioeconomic definition cannot be so easily achieved. Those who are dissatisfied with minimalist/formalist interpretations usually include criteria such as redistributive socioeconomic reforms, broadened popular participation, social justice, and human rights. Even minimalists, however, would generally concede that the formal requirements of multiparty democracy cannot be sustained unless they are legitimised by the achievement of basic human needs' (Qadir, Clapham & Gills 1993: 416). When speaking of democracy, elements of the minimalist definition must be fulfilled. The composition of a maximalist definition, on the other hand, is ambiguous. The above given interpretation is a rather Western style definition of democracy. It is important to notice that views other than that exist: each one of them is a reflection of ideas, interests and values. Thus, the idea of a governmental structure being a democracy only when it resembles the western style concept is wrong; each view is a subjective image of an ideal system.

Democratization is the process of introducing democratic aspects within the functioning of a state. The most important aspect of democratization is the problem of forming a government: 'if popular election of top decision makers is the essence of democracy, then the critical point in the process of democratization is the replacement of a government that was not chosen this way by one that is selected in a free, open, and fair election' (Huntington 1993: 9). However, the overall process of democratisation before and after that election is usually more extensive, complex and prolonged. It involves several steps including bringing about the end of the nondemocratic regime, the inauguration of the democratic regime, and then the consolidation of the democratic system

(Huntington 1993: 9).[3] 'Democratization implies a historical process, whereas 'democracy' implies some kind of end state or ideal form' (Qadir, Clapham & Gills 1993: 417).

That historical process is also known as the 'democratic transition process'. 'To understand what actually happens during transitions, several stages, or 'sequences', have been identified to map the various (irreversible) steps in regime change' (Biekart 1999: 29). These stages include the authoritarian period, early transition, mid-transition, late transition and early consolidation. The process of democratic transition is not as simple and linear as it sounds. It is a slow process 'in which stages of progress and retreat can be identified' (Biekart 1999: 47).

The main question is how political society and, in relation with, civil society can play a part in this democratic transition process. Are the concepts useful at all? And if so, should the focus lie on just one of those concepts or are both, and the connection between them, important factors in relation to democratization? In the next section, several different notions will be discussed.

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[3] In contrast to democratization, liberalization 'is the partial opening of an authoritarian system short of choosing governmental leaders through freely competitive elections' (Huntington 1993: 9). Liberalization refers fundamentally to civil society, while democratization involves it, but refers fundamentally to political society (Stepan 1988: 6).

The 'Pluralist' Notion: Civil Society Overrated?

Civil society is considered an important factor in relation to democratization. Traditionally the concept has always played a prominent role in explaining processes of democratization (Cavatorta 2009: 1). The assumption is that a causal relation exists between both concepts. That relation is illustrated in the following scheme, the plus indicating a positive causal relation:

Figure 2 The causal relation between civil society and democratization in the 'pluralist' notion
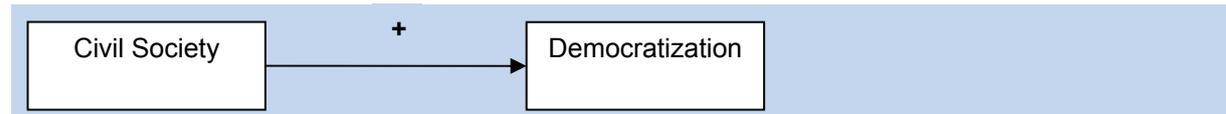
'Until recently, this assumption has been rarely questioned' (Cavatorta 2009: 1). The 'classical' idea is that civil society is a counterbalance to (the power of) the state. 'The pluralist notion holds that civil society represents a reservoir of resources – political, economic, cultural, moral – to check and balance the power of the state' (Diamond 1992: 7). From this notion follows that civil society is (partially) capable of controlling the state. According to Biekart, that idea originates from experiences of western political democracies 'where civil society plays an important role in sustaining 'unrestricted' democratic political systems. A 'vibrant' and 'autonomous' civil society is usually understood in terms of its *pluralism* (number, size and variety) of interests that are organized; its *democratic orientation* (the civic values that are pursued) and its *political participation* (active use of civic rights and duties), and the formation of new leadership' (Biekart 1999: 35). A more 'vibrant' and 'autonomous' civil society is believed to be better capable of checking and balancing the power of the state, bottom-up. The focus within this theory is exclusively on civil society; political society is hardly considered an important concept regarding democratization.

Since the late 1990s criticism exists regarding the validity of both the theoretical assumptions and the empirical evidence of the 'pluralist' notion. 'The traditional assumption regarding the strong linkage between civic activism and democratisation has snowballed since then' (Cavatorta 2009: 1). There are two major problems concerning the traditional assumption. The first problem with the 'pluralist' notion of civil society is that it doesn't differentiate 'between the forces that occupy either civil society or political society. The 'density' of civil society certainly is important, but obscures the fact that there are differences in power and interests between the constituent parts of civil society. The question is whether actors in civil society are at all able to define their role *vis-à-vis* either political society or the state, when (as happened during many transitions) traditional political elites appear to be immune to pressures from civil society. It is not convincingly argued how a 'stronger civil society' would necessarily weaken the power of traditional elites and increase social and political equality, unless civil society is considered 'as an arena of contestation, a space which reflects the divisions of society as a whole' (Biekart 1999: 35-36). Civil society, thus, isn't one united, concordant sphere wherein all actors have the same interests and ideas. It exists out of multiple dimensions. The first one, as already mentioned, 'depends on the patterns of conflict and cooperation between various parts (or sectors) that make up civil society' (Biekart 1999: 37). This is also known as 'the balance between

classes and class coalitions extended to include also gender and ethnic balances' (Rueschemeyer *et al.* 1992; Biekart 1999: 37). The second dimension of civil society depends on fundamental elements of the state, like the structure, strength and autonomy, and 'on the international political environment' (White 1994; Robinson 1995). Civil society, in some cases, might be non-democratic, or even undemocratic, aiming for goals which are incompatible with democratic transition.

The second and most fundamental problem of the 'classical', or 'pluralist', notion are the assumptions considering the link between civil society and democratization. A strong and robust civil society, in the 'pluralist' notion, was 'postulated as a precondition for democratization and democratic consolidation' (Sardamov 2005: 380). However, this notion is being revised: it is hard to 'prove' the causal relation between civil society and democratization. Several scholars have indicated that such a relation isn't as straightforward as the 'pluralist' notion presents. Because of possible endogeneity between both concepts (although the assumption is that stronger civil society results in democratization, the opposite may be at work at the same time; more democracy results in more/stronger civil society), the actual causal relation is hard to measure. On top of that, there is the problem of omitted variable bias. The process of democratization is much more complex than presented in figure 2: many explanatory and/or intermediate variables are involved in the process. Not controlling for those variables gives measurement errors. Although it is possible to control for multiple explanatory variables, the difficult part is finding those variables for which to control.

One could say that the 'pluralist' notion is based on hope rather than actual (scientific) findings. Sardamov, for example, notices that 'the correlation between 'civil society' and democracy may be spurious, both phenomena being shaped by deeper social processes related to modernization and individualization. The relatively efficient functioning of political and economic institutions and mechanisms within western societies may not be a result of the vigorous activities of dense networks of voluntary associations based on formal membership and written statutes. Rather, institutions and civic networks can both be seen as epiphenomenal, deriving their existence and vigour from more fundamental transformations of human associations and personality' (Sardamov 2005: 380, 389). According to Wiktorowicz civil society institutions are less a mechanism of collective empowerment and more an instrument of social control by the state. Expansions of civil society do not lead inevitably to the realization of a comprehensive form of democracy. 'In fact, several studies indicate that the growth of civil society can actually threaten political freedom' (Wictorowicz 2000: 46). He states that nondemocratic forces and movements can use civil society to undermine democratic practices. The reality of political context should be taken into account to temper optimism about 'the possible empowering role of civil society, shared by various versions [including the 'pluralist' notion] of the civil society approach' (Wictorowicz 2000: 46).

Considering these remarks, we might still conclude that an active and diverse civil society (probably) often plays a valuable role within the democratization process. 'It can discipline the state, ensure that citizens' interests are taken seriously, and foster greater civic and political participation' (Carothers 1999: 22). However, this role is less straightforward, less isolated, more complex and certainly more criticized. Carothers accentuates that there is some evidence that dangerous political weaknesses are reflected by a strong civil society. Proliferation of interests groups in developed democracies can

make the workings of representative institutions impossible 'and systematically distort policy outcomes in favor of the better organized. Even in established democracies with strong political institutions there are reasons to doubt the simplistic idea that when it comes to civil society, 'the more the better' (Carothers 1999: 22-23). Thus, it is helpful to involve concepts which might be useful concerning democratization, other than civil society. This is where political society comes 'into play'.

## The 'Critical' Notion: Political Society as the Missing Link

As mentioned before, political society is the mediating sphere between the state and civil society and the key institutions of political society are political parties (Biekart 1999: 33). The assumption of the 'critical' notion is that political society is *at this stage in time* crucial for a genuine democracy (Carothers 2006: 10). 'In a well-functioning democracy, parties represent citizens' interests before the state […], engage and involve citizens in democratic participation, structure the political choices that citizens have in elections and form the governments and take responsibility for governing' (Carothers 2006: 9). Thus, both civil society and political society are believed to be important *stimuli* for democratic transition. However, disagreement exists about which of both concepts 'comes first'. The 'pluralist' notion, mentioned above, focuses on civil society and holds that civil society should be strengthened first: after that, political society will follow.

Figure 3 The relations between civil society, political society and democratization in the 'pluralist' notion
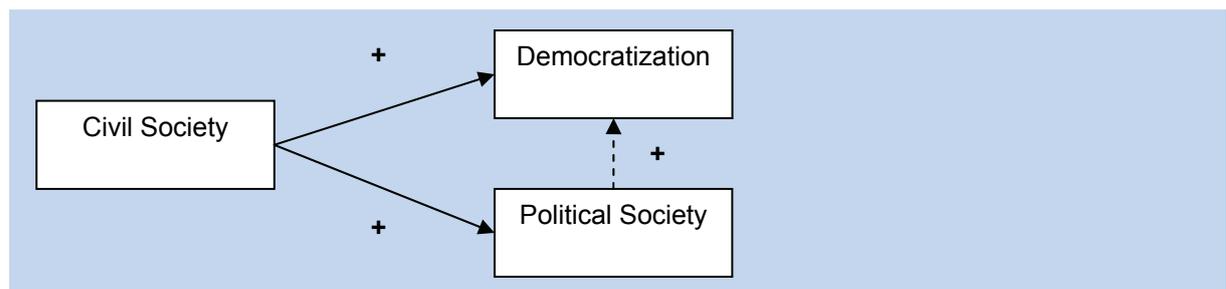
Most critics of that notion argue the opposite and try to convince the (academic) world to focus foremost on political society. Civil society, the argument goes, can't carry the democratization process on its own and political society should be given more attention. Civil society, seen from this perspective, plays a minor but ambiguous role in stimulating democratization. Some argue that it does stimulate democratization, though only minimally. Another vision holds civil society as a spoiler of democratic change. In other words, civil society in that case is regarded as an obstacle for democratic transition and therefore an instrument used to hold on to authoritarian power.

Figure 4 The relations between civil society, political society and democratization in the 'critical' notion
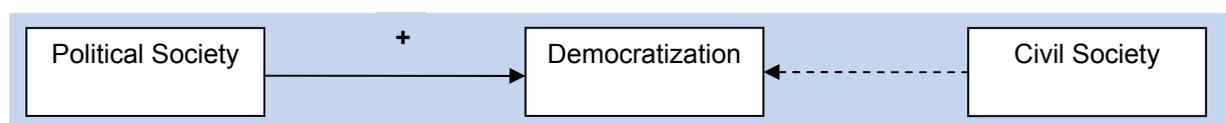
Langohr, for example, writes that in many Arab liberalizing regimes advocacy nongovernmental organizations have risen to the position of opposition parties. This role decreases changes for democratization because 'these organizations generally advocate the interest of a specific group and are almost entirely dependent on foreign funding' (Langohr 2004: 181-182). Langohr's advises to focus on opposition political parties when looking for democratization, because advocacy nongovernmental organizations are not suitable for the job. As mentioned earlier, Sardamov, Carothers and Wiktorowitcz warn of the shortcomings and dangers of civil society as well. They all recommend to focus less on civil society and more on political society. Sardamov argues that more attention should be given to democratic assistance and the establishment of stable and efficient social and political institutions, instead of focusing excessively on civil society assistance. 'Maintenance of key social infrastructures that have become crucial to the legitimacy of any contemporary system of government' is also important (Sardamov 2005: 380). In agreement with that, Wiktorowicz illustrates that it is important to understand the political context when looking for political change. The political context shapes and limits the potential of civil society to act as an engine of political change. Thus, the assumption of civil society pressing democracy or serving as a mechanism of empowerment might be misleading in certain occasions (Wiktorowitcz 2000: 46). In fact, political change (especially in the Middle East), in the form of moderate liberalization, is often part of a regime survival strategy 'in the face of deteriorating economic conditions […] to maximize their continued social control'. Such reforms are 'initiated by regimes without any significant mobilization or pressure from civil society'(Wiktorowitcz 2000: 46-47). Brumberg agrees with that notion when he writes that state initiated and managed political liberalization works because it creates real reforms in civil society as well as in the electoral system, the economy and parliament. Even though such reforms are partial and limited, 'they bring additional benefit to the regimes in question, and to some extend, to their opposition as well' (Brumberg 2003: 7). Democracy promoters focus on the growth of nongovernmental organizations, however, those NGOs are no substitute for well-organized political parties or representative parliaments. 'The essential elements for democracy are political parties that speak for organized constituencies, parliaments that have the constitutional authority to speak on behalf of the electorate, and constitutions that impose limits on executive authority' (Brumberg 2003: 8). Thus, instead of haphazardly following the 'pluralist' notion it is important to focus on political society and the state when studying/promoting democratization and the impact of civil society on the democratic transition process.

The 'critical' notion, as mentioned above, points towards political society as the main sphere of democratization. However, there are several problems with this notion. On the one hand critique is aimed at opposition parties within authoritarian political systems and struggling democracies. On the other hand it is aimed at (Western) party aid organizations. To start with the opposition parties, except for the electoral fraud and outright repression they suffer from, they also have a share in failing to be a main driver of democratization. Most of the time, non-ruling parties make use of independent candidacy and those independent party leaders often feel threatened by reforms and therefore resist them.

Opposition parties also suffer from organizational weaknesses which prevents them from taking full advantage of external sponsored assistance. This leads to financial fragility (Langohr 2004: 189; Carothers 2006: 214). Another possible weakness of political society becomes 'visible' at the early transition/mid transition phase of the democratic transition process. Opposition parties have to be somewhat united and make common demands on the regime for the opening up of closed societies to be temporarily successful. This coalition-building is a top priority and therefore it is expected that such coalitions will be formed. Especially in countries where secular and Islamist opposition movements exists side by side such a coalition does not come about.[4] Cavatorta hypothesizes 'that coalition-building does not occur because of ideological differences and tactical considerations between opposition actors, played out in a context where the international dimension has become a crucial variable in how domestic political and economic arrangements are advanced' (Cavatorta 2009: 142). This is especially the case in the Middle East and North Africa, but might apply to other countries, where ideological divisions between opposition parties exist, as well. This lack of unity in political opposition can become a relevant weakness regarding democratization.

As mentioned before, the critique is also aimed at (western) party aid organizations. According to Carothers, the state of political parties in new or struggling democracies is troubled, which is a central challenge to democratization. That is why party aid should be a top priority of the international community. However, the way party aid is given until now 'had very limited effects and very rarely transformative effects' (Carothers 2006: 213-215). It is true that party aid is hindered by underlying economic, political, social and cultural conditions which are hard to reform, however, apart from that, chronic methodological weaknesses exist in party aid itself ("cookie-cutter methods")(Carothers 2006: 215). Until now party aid providers haven't created a secure, widely accepted domestic model of success; local party/political situations are rarely or very briefly analyzed and few party aid organizations have made use of independent evaluations of projects and/or procedures (Carothers 2006: 214-215).

The above mentioned weaknesses of political society have two important consequences. It tempers expectations regarding political society as the (main) stimulant of democratization because until now the high expectations are not fulfilled. However, it is too early to write off the concept of political society completely. Processes of economic liberalization and privatization, although often a major obstacle for democratization, may help to strengthen (opposition) political parties (Willis 2002: 19). Apart from that, it is possible for party aid 'to go deeper' and to improve in order to make political society an important cause of democratization. The second implication is that the location of key battles for democratization is the nongovernmental association sector rather than political parties (Langohr 2004: 192). It is here where political and civil society seem to interact with each other. It is believed that when one of the two concepts is too weak, the other takes over. Despite criticism on both civil and political society, it looks like the two concepts *together* play a part in the democratization process. Until now the focus was on isolated concepts: either civil society or political society as stimulus of democratization. To analyze the actual roles they play, a third notion holds, the concepts should be examined in relation to each other instead of being looked at isolated.

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[4] The same applies for civil society organizations which are engaged in political matters ('politicized civil society') when established political parties are largely ineffective (Cavatorta & Elananza 2008: 564).

Linking Concepts Together: the 'Hybrid' Notion

Following the 'pluralistic' notion, civil society has the possibility to pressure democratization from below (Wiktorowicz 2000: 57). The 'critical' notion, on the other hand, holds that political society can bring democratic transformations top-down. Both notions plead for a specific focus on either civil society or political society. However, it is already noticed that both perspectives can count on some firm criticism and a tradeoff between both notions 'suggests that a strategic choice could be made between a top-down approach of elite transitions 'forging political society', and a bottom-up approach of increasing popular pressure and participation from below, by strengthening civil society' (Weffort 1993; Nunnenkamp 1995; Biekart 1999: 35). In reality the process of democratization is more complex and according to a third perspective, which I will call the 'hybrid' notion, both processes are interdependent and take place simultaneously. Following the 'hybrid' notion, all three concepts, the state, civil and political society, are interconnected. 'The state, civil society and political society together exhaust the scope of public life, and none of these concepts can be fully understood in isolation from the other' (Biekart 1999: 36). The following scheme (figure 5) can be used to illustrate the balance of power between the state, civil society and political society. The scheme, except for the visualization of government within political society, is introduced by Biekart (1999). The grey and red spots, presenting citizens, are (partially) imported from another model of Biekart (Biekart 1999: 98).

Figure 5 The state, civil society and political society in the 'hybrid' notion

● = Citizens within civil society

● = From civil society excluded citizens
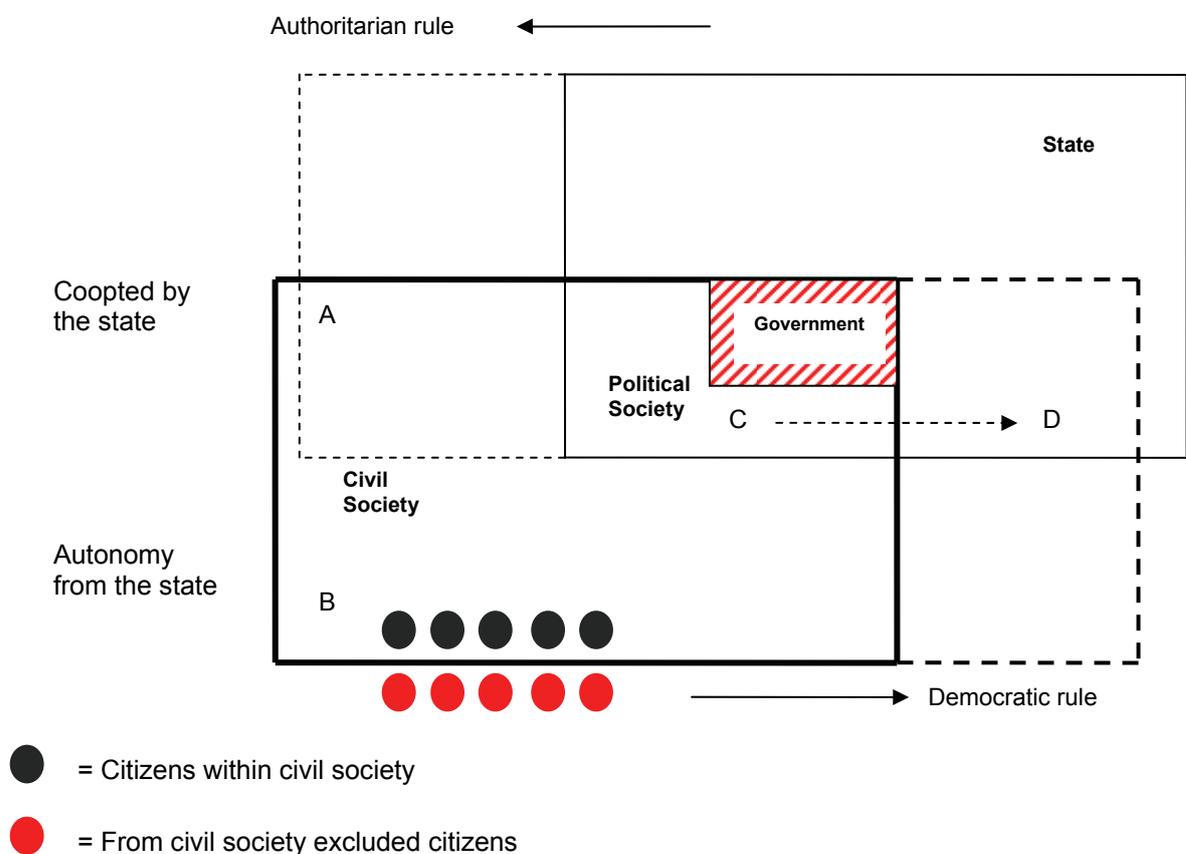
Within civil society, organizations are between fully autonomous of the state (B) or co-opted by the state (A). When most organizations are located in area B, civil society is usually strong compared to the state. When located in area A instead, civil society is weak *vis-à-vis* the state. When looking at bottom-up democratization, the position of civil society has consequences for the strength of political society. Organizations in civil society can also (temporarily) be included in political society, working as mediating actors between the state and civil society. If such actors are mostly active in area D, political society can be seen as a counterbalancing force in regard to the state. This force is 'manifested by efforts for political and social reform. Civil society ideally pushes mediating organizations to move from area (C) to (D), so as to increase the leverage towards the state' (Biekart 1999: 42-43). According to Biekart, organizations in civil society can strengthen political society in five ways: '(a) building the foundations of civil society, (b) building alliances in civil society, (c) developing intermediary channels between the state and civil society [temporal political society], (d) opening up transnational political space [trans-/international dimension] and (e) building citizenship [deep political engagement]' (Biekart 1999: 43). Eventually, when strong enough, part of political society forms a chosen government existing out of one or more political parties. In this model, 'strengthening civil society is only one part of democratic transition; the other is to strengthen the state by making it transparent and more accountable. Ideally, these processes go hand in hand' (Biekart 1999: 43).

Biekart does not mention the possible strengthening of civil society by political society. In Biekart's scheme, the state is seen as the top within the top-down process. The strengthening of civil society in that case is logically prior to the realization of political society. In theory, however, the possibility exists that political society, after being created out of civil society, develops more quickly than that same civil society. In that case, democratization is established the other way around: by strengthening political society *vis-à-vis* the state, eventually more space will open up for civil society. Civil society in that case still comes prior to political society, however, only in the beginning of the democratization process. After the initial phase, political society takes over and develops prior to civil society. Both concepts together drive democratization, only this time political society 'taking the lead'. Such a process can occur, for example, when state-managed political liberalization opens the door to democratization. In such cases the state might allow opposition parties some space (to gain international legitimacy for example) while civil society is continued to be repressed on the earlier level. The received space may then be used to strengthen the opposition, which on its turn can stimulate the opening up of civil society, ultimately leading to democratization. Political society can strengthen civil society by creating genuine political trust and engagement and by introducing legislation which allows civil society to open up. This process should be regarded as part of the top-down democratization within the 'hybrid' notion.[5] Ideally, both the top-down and bottom-up processes occur at the same time. That is the core of the 'hybrid' notion: strengthening civil society and strengthening political society are both part and parcel of democratic transition. Civil society and political society are thus believed to be two sides of the same coin.

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[5] Although the process starts within civil society (by creating political society) and thus originates as a bottom-up dynamic, ultimately political society takes over and the process changes into a top-down dynamic. However, the difference between bottom-up and top-down in this process is less unambiguous than outlined above: both dynamics take place next to each other at the same time.

Although more complete than both the 'pluralist' and the 'critical' notion, the 'hybrid' point of view is not free from doubt and critique either. Daniel Stevens, for instance, argues that 'the implication [of this model] is that the relation between the two is largely sequential. […] Thus civil society is logically prior to political society—without interests being articulated at the level of the single issue, political society will have no raw material with which to create these broader aggregated constituencies. The role of political society is 'adopting and processing political demands from civil society'—acting in a mediatory role between civil society and the state' (Stevens 2007: 51). According to Stevens, the model does explain (some of) the nature of state-society relations in established liberal democracies and has (some) prescriptive power in less developed ones. However, at the definitional level it fails to highlight the nature of politics in contexts where political society is poorly developed. An even more important weakness in the model is 'the assumption that civil society and political society have essentially complementary functions' (Stevens 2007: 52). Stevens argues that civil society and political society do not always go hand in hand. Hyden's model, which is practically the same as the 'hybrid' notion, is especially misleading regarding the applied definition of political society. It focuses too much on liberal democracies when defining political society in terms of the institutions of political parties, elections and the legislature (Stevens 2007: 52). In his article, Stevens concentrates on the case of Uzbekistan, and although the above mentioned terms are mainly absent there, political competition does exist. The fact that the competition is largely informal does not imply that it can be ignored. Although focusing on Uzbekistan, it is expected that such findings will apply for other countries as well.

The concept promoted by Partha Chatterjee takes informal competition into account. In Uzbekistan, for example, two extremes exist within political society. On the one hand 'a range of informal organizations that, while often operating without registration and largely underground, are quite overt in their attempts to challenge the existing regime' (Stevens 2007: 53). At the other hand, officially independent political parties exist, however, those parties are largely organized by the regime. Between those extremes 'is a cluster of organizations that form an informal oppositional political society whose operations straddle between its largely exiled leaders and in-country activists' (Stevens 2007: 53). In contrast to the classical notion, Chatterjee suggests that demands from civil society do not necessarily translate easily into a political reaction; 'there is in fact a rift there' (Chatterjee in Stevens 2007: 54). According to Chatterjee, both civil and political society are operating under different logics, 'with civil society a largely *burgeois* activity operating within official institutions under the 'rule of law' while political society represents the struggle for welfare and political recognition in ways that are not always consistent with the principles of association in civil society' (Chatterjee; Stevens 2007: 54). In Uzbekistan, even when both civil and political society aim at the same goals, they perceive themselves as distinct because of different organizational types and followed strategies. This contrast and feeling of competition between the two 'societies' has been troublesome for the democratization process because it has given the regime the opportunity to 'divide and rule' (Stevens 2007: 58-59).

A final important finding of Stevens is that although it was mainly the state that was responsible for keeping both elements apart, international donor strategies proved to be problematic as well. Many international (aid) agencies preferred to engage with the modern NGO sector 'created in its own

image'. This was done because it delivered concrete results that secured the funding of the aid programmes by home governments (Stevens 2007: 60). While such results are concrete, they hardly contribute to liberal style democratization. Stevens thus points out that civil society and political society do not always complete each other. Indeed, both concepts may hinder each other even when eventually aiming for the same goals.

Until now three notions on the contribution of civil society and political society to democratization have been reviewed: the pluralist/classical, the critical and finally the hybrid notion. All three of them have been criticized and the topic as a whole generates a lot of doubt and uncertainty. One conclusion already seems certain: the roles civil society and political society play with regard to democratization are more complex than any of the three notions suggest.

No Clear-Cut (Causal) Relations: the 'Complex' Notion(s)

Since democratization is a very complex process, researchers, in order to be able to explain, start looking at connections which seem logical and less complex. As mentioned before, such findings are often (partially) based on hope and guessing rather than actual (scientific) findings. The simplistic idea of civil society and/or political society being the only important stimuli of democratization should be given up. It is necessary to drop notions which concentrate on clear-cut (causal) relations, the 'hybrid' notion inclusive, and replace them with more complex models. That does not imply that all aspects of the three above mentioned notions are useless, nor that recent attempts to strengthen theories with statistical data have not contributed anything to the debate. Every well considered and executed attempt is important: it keeps the search for answers alive and it deepens our scientific knowledge. Both civil and political society are concepts which deserve attention in prospective research. However, it is important to broaden the search and to study the big picture instead of the impact of isolated concepts on democratization. When looking at one concept in particular nontheless, it is important to deepen that view: highly selective research on promising aspects of those concepts instead of marking the whole concept as 'democracy improving'.

Because the subject is so complex, more 'complex' notions will arise once studying 'all' factors affecting democratization. In the next section a scheme of possible causal relations regarding democratization will be given. It is important to notice that this example, like any model, is incomplete and in a later (more complete) stadium should be analyzed statistically.

Context is a very important factor when studying democratization processes. No 'one size fits all' formula exists. The context of a country or region defines the situation, the possibilities and the concepts which are essential when looking for change. Ideas probably play a role within democratic transition as well. Different ideas within civil society, political society, the state/regime, the international community and key players within those spheres influence how democratization materializes. The same applies for interests. When (roughly) the same ideas and interests live in all spheres, interaction will mainly be cooperative. When disagreement exits there will be conflict. If a state/region lacks democracy, however defined, the chance of transition might also depend on the number of people pleading for change and the strength of the will and courage such people have and display. In other words, the success of democratization probably also depends on the sacrifices people are willing to make. Figure 6 illustrates the above mentioned model schematically.

As can be seen, all mentioned concepts are connected with each other. The interactions between context, interests, ideas and willingness to sacrifice give an outcome which interacts with the outcome of interactions between the state, civil and political society. Both outcomes, separately and together, have a possible (causal) relation with democratization. Whether that relation is positive, negative or does not exist at all, depends on all relations between the separate concepts mentioned in the scheme.

As mentioned above, this model serves as an example. First of all it shows the complexity of the relation between democratization and concepts regarded as democratic transition stimuli. Secondly, it is an attempt to find (causal) relations and connections between different concepts, under which democratization. Though this model has added value already at this moment, because it breaks with the simplistic notions discussed earlier in this article, it only truly contributes something in a later stage, when used making inferences.

Figure 6 One of the possible 'complex' notions
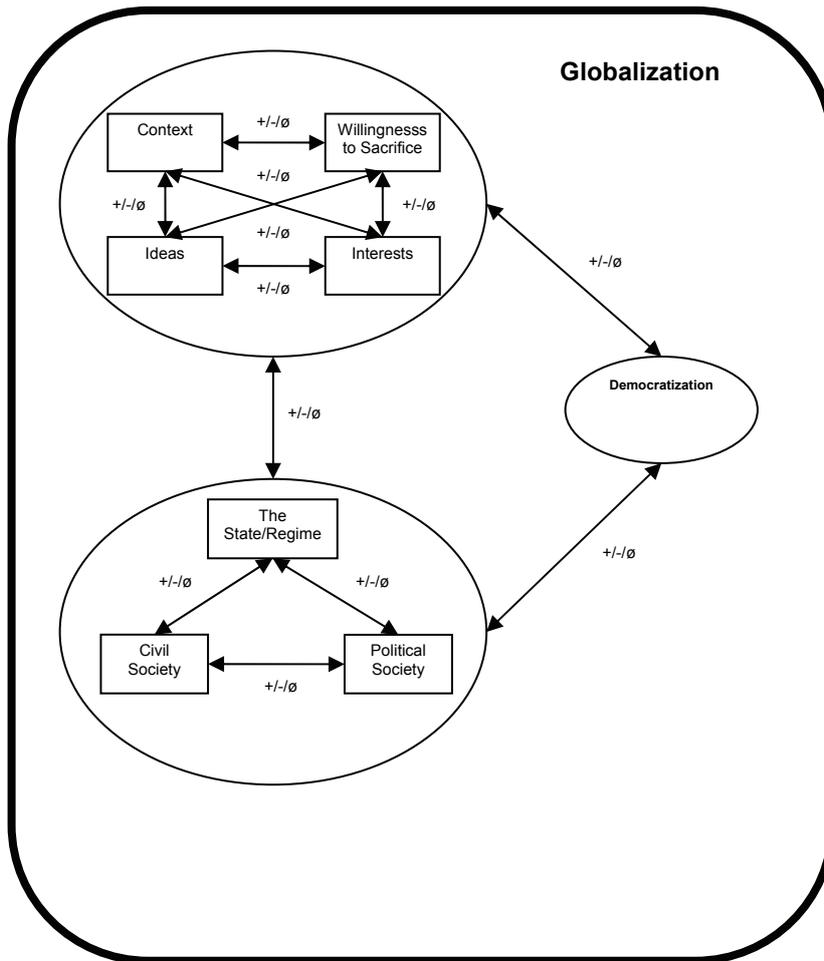
+/-/ø = the causal relation can be positive, negative or absent.
The thick black line is the 'visualization' of globalization, in which the process takes place.

Recommendations

The 'complex' model breaks with a tradition of simplistic theories in which concepts are (mainly) studied isolated and few variables are involved. That does not mean, however, that the concepts of civil society and political society are not worth studying. When researched outside its isolation and within a greater model, both concepts probably will be helpful in explaining democratization. Thus, apart from the advice not to focus on civil or political society in isolation, several recommendations can be made:

Coalitions

Policy makers and international aid organizations should work in favor of building bridges between opposing organizations/parties in civil and/or political society 'to form coalitions capable of removing authoritarian leaders without the country descending into chaos' (Cavatorta & Elananza 2008: 578). According to Cavatorta and Elananza 'neither current policy decisions nor publicly available advice to policy makers seems to go in that direction' (Cavatorta & Elananza 2008: 578). Although the assumption is that conflicts will occur when involving other opposing groups, coalition building is especially hard when involving opposing religious and secular groups. Cavatorta mainly focuses on the lack of coalition building between Islamists and secular groups in the MENA region, where tactical and ideological differences are responsible for divided oppositions (Cavatorta 2009: 142). It will not be easy, if not impossible, to get past those differences. Apart from that, most of the time when coalitions do come into existence, it involves single issue organizations within civil society. The cooperation in such cases rarely passes on to other issues. However, positive results may follow when stimulating coalition building on issues outside the conflict-areas. When successful, the possibility of growing trust increases and cooperation may spread to more controversial areas and to other spheres, like civil society. The chance of avoiding the 'single issue trap' is probably greatest when concentrating on political society in the beginning of the process. The 'nature' of political society, especially considering political parties, leaves less space for single issue intentions.

Political party aid

When focusing on political society, within the greater whole of the democratization process, the recommendations of Carothers are most valuable. Earlier in this article, weaknesses of political parties and party aid have been mentioned. According to Carothers parties in many new/struggling democracies are not being rooted in their own society and lack much connection to civil society (Carothers 2006: 134-135). Part of the explanation for such weaknesses are 'trends of increasing economic and social dislocations [which] have engendered growing public sceptism toward public institutions and civic participation' (Sardamov 2005: 396). Given the vision that political parties will not be replaced by other types of democratic institution any time soon, it is important to strengthen them in order to support real democratization processes. Obviously, that is easier said than done and most of the problems will not disappear by efforts of party aid organizations. However, some things can be done. Party aid organizations should make (more) use of (scientific) research and findings.

Methodological weaknesses and cursory assessments of local party and political scenes are not unavoidable aspects of party aid work; aid organizations choose to work that way. By using research and making it an integral part of procedures, aid can become 'context-made'. Following Carothers, party aid groups should invest in serious independent (project) evaluations to improve the way they work as well. Finally, they should aim at strengthening political parties.

Context

Context is a keyword regarding democratization efforts. When researching democratic transition, context should dictate on what aspects and concepts to focus. That is the reason why many complex notions exist and no 'one size fits all' solution is available. When thinking about context, countries, regions or continents often cross the mind. Recently, the contrast between 'Western style concepts' and 'Islamic style concepts'[6] have been added to that list. In a certain way the emergence of that contrast is something positive because it damages the simplistic notion of 'western style concepts' being the only (good) ones to exist. Often the argument is heard that a democracy is only a real democracy when it has western style ideas about civil or political society. Such ideas are 'not only wrong but also dangerous. A strong belief in civil society should not fuel intolerant attitude toward different kinds of democracies' (Carothers 1999: 23). A recommendation for anyone working in the field of democratic transition is to drop the notions of Western style democracy as the only one conceivable. If actual practice has thought us anything the last few decades it is the incorrectness of such a perspective. Context should at least be considered (if not leading) when shaping concepts, procedures and policy.

Pressure governments:

In the non-Western world, a great deal depends on (Western) democratic governments when looking for positive changes. As a matter of fact, the question is what 'positive' exactly means in that sentence. Despite some soft criticism, Western governments often support dictatorships in the name of stability consolidation and protection of own interests. A good example is the support for certain dictatorial regimes because of, among other things, the anxiety for the ruling of Islamists political parties. As long as such support remains daily practice, real transitions in the form of democratization remain impossible. The question is, in other words, whether democratization in many cases is regarded as a positive matter at all. Do Western governments really want democratization for all counterparts over the world? When the answer to that question is negative, the recommendations in this article won't make much sense. Without gebuine support of governments it won't be able to achieve genuine democratization. Therefore, when actively stimulating democratization, interests of the international community should be considered and, when necessary, tried to be influenced.

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[6] Concepts being civil society, political society, democracy, ideas etc.

Conclusion

Four notions have been discussed in this article, all having different perspectives on the role political and civil society, in relation with each other, play within democratic transitions. Supporters of the 'pluralist' notion focus on civil society, thereby paying less attention to political society. Though political society is relevant, they say, in many cases the main stimulus for democratization is civil society. Following this notion, political society is often restricted and therefore too weak to bring about reforms. Within the 'critical' notion things are seen the other way around: according to that notion too much attention is being given to civil society despite its failing to bring large-scale transition. In other words, the 'critical' notion holds that only pressure from political society can lead to genuine democracy. Then there is the 'hybrid' notion, in which both civil and political society are considered important regarding democratization. The argument within that particular notion is that democratic transition is a top-down (from political society) as well as a bottom-up (from civil society) process. Only when they stop looking at an isolated civil and/or political society researchers will be able to come up with convincing explanations. Looking at this notion, civil society and political society are two sides of the same coin, complementing each other in the struggle for democratization.

Nevertheless, the main conclusion of this article is that none of those notions is realistic. Though the 'hybrid' notion is more complete and plausible compared to the 'pluralist' and 'critical' notions, the relations between democratization and other concepts are more complex than this perspective presumes. As figure 6, as one of many possible 'complex' models, points out, many intervening variables are involved in the process of democratization. Civil and political society, thus, are part of a multi-sided and complex model. The challenge at this moment is to 'design' different possible models and try to verify those models with statistical methods. That search will guarantee the continuation of the debate regarding democratization, in the right direction.

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The paper is produced in the framework of the Knowledge Programme on Civil Society in West Asia. This is a joint initiative by Hivos and the University of Amsterdam with the purpose of generating and integrating knowledge on the roles and opportunities for civil society actors in democratization processes in politically challenging environments. This programme integrates academic knowledge and practitioner's knowledge from around the world to develop new insights and strategies on how civil society actors in Syria and Iran can contribute to various processes of democratization and how international actors can support this.

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