PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING, PARTICIPATORY CIVIL SOCIETY: A KEY FOR DISSOLVING ELITE RULE IN NEW DEMOCRACIES IN THE ERA OF GLOBALIZATION

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The author argues that in democracies a strong state and strong civil society are not mutually exclusive. Only a democratic, legitimate, and strong state can provide the environment for civil society activities to flourish; in return, only a strong and participatory civil society can outline the reach of state strength vis-à-vis the society. The author discusses the need for civil society organizations to collaborate with policy-making institutions, in which they can negotiate policy concerns with ministers and officials while retaining an independent distance from the state and the political parties. Further, the author argues that an environment as such would provide for the transformative capacity of human agency to manifest itself in full in a globalizing world. The author discusses how participatory state and civil society structures will enhance the role of the human agency in order to dissolve elite rule, especially in new democracies.

KEYWORDS: Democracy, globalization, participatory civil society, participatory policy-making.

INTRODUCTION

This article argues that in democracies a strong state and a strong civil society are not mutually exclusive. A balanced relationship between the two is particularly needed, given the evolution of global civil society and the emergence of multinational, multicultural, multiethnic democracies. An evolution as such entails a system, where equal opportunities for all groups to represent their interests peacefully are of utmost importance. Given the inequality of resources available to various civil society groups in a pluralist environment, the state should be responsible for providing an environment for various sectors of the society to voice their claims equally. In return, the civil society groups should not only retain their independence from the state, but also should make sure that other civil society groups do not establish a more advantageous relationship with the state relative to the others. Furthermore, they should also maintain democratic internal decision-making structures. Only a democratic, legitimate and strong state can provide the
environment for civil society activities to flourish; in return, only a strong and a participatory civil society can outline the reach of state strength vis-à-vis the society.

Balance and collaboration between the state and civil society are keys for their mutual empowerment. This is the case as far as these actors support each other in a complementary fashion in day-to-day interaction. In this respect, the duty of the state is to assist the civil society with resources and expertise that would be otherwise unavailable, such as the necessary framework for regular meetings, and then later to maintain a “hands-off” stance with respect to further civil society activities. In return, the civil society organizations should provide the state agents with expertise and a working hand whenever there a need arises. It is important for civil society organizations to collaborate with policy-making institutions, in which they can negotiate policy concerns with ministers and officials while retaining an independent distance from the state and the political parties. In line with the theme of this special issue, therefore, I argue that an environment as such would provide for the transformative capacity of human agency to manifest itself in full in a globalizing world. As such, in this article I will present how participatory state and civil society structures will enhance the role of the human agency in order to dissolve elite rule especially in new democracies.

THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN DEMOCRATIC SYSTEMS

This article argues that civil society activities are relevant for political systems once they—in Habermas’ words (1992)—become parts of the *Systemwelt*, elevating from the *Lebenswelt*. That is, the issues civil society organizations represent are no longer confined to the private lives of the organizations’ members, but are relevant to ongoing problems in the political system. An issue becomes a part of the *Systemwelt* when it concerns individuals with broader affiliations than family, church, club, or business. Thus, civil society activities potentially involve the individual in decisions about the collective affairs of a chosen group in ways that leisure-time activities typically do not (Pateman, 1977, p. 55). Civil society organizations devoted to causes of public interests emerge, at this stage, to contribute to the system. They are legally separate from the state, and democratic states are in a position to guarantee civil society actors both personal and collective liberties in the public sphere (Bernhard, 1993; Rueschemeyer, 1998).

Civil society organizations should be distinct from political parties and the market. As such, I do not accept Putnam’s (1993) general definition of civil society, which includes all societal groups with the means to provide their members with “social capital.” I assume that both the transformation into a political organization and the choice to remain parochial are hazardous to civil society groups (Heller, 1996, p. 1057). Furthermore, this understanding also differs in particular from the liberal conceptualization of the term. The liberal perspective regards civil society as an essential aid to the state, especially in terms of reducing the state’s total burden, and as a check on state excesses. It envisages the democratic state as a minimal state (Cohen and Arato, 1992). Moreover, the liberal understanding of civil society (Diamond, 1994) neglects power structures within civil society organizations. In contrast to this approach, the optimal relationship between civil society and the
state occurs in a context where each is strong, and where they collaborate on equal terms.

The state in its turn, in democratic regimes, must operate within the ensemble of interwoven organizations, rather than acting as a unitary agent of intervention. States are holistic structures (Cerny, 1990, p. 166): they contain institutions through which social interests are represented in policy-making (Skocpol, 1990, p. 29), governments and the bureaucracies that depend on them for authority, and the public officials—elected and appointed to high and low levels—who participate in developing public policy (Nordlinger, 1981).

The implementation of rights on the part of the private organizations and of duties on the part of the state occurs in the “public sphere.” I regard the state as one of several actors in interactions with various other actors within this public sphere. I will discuss this approach at length in the next sections. By now, it suffices to say that my approach to state does not conflict with that of Max Weber (1984, p. 33), who argues that the state is a political organization with specific means and a monopoly over the use of legitimate force. As long as politics denote the attempt to share power or the attempt to influence the distribution of power among groups, a legitimate authority is necessary to prevent anarchy (Nordlinger, 1987). Briefly, governmental domination by “virtue of legality” (Weber, 1996) provides civil society with a space for organized social activities.

Hence, this article opposes the libertarian notion that civil society can replace political parties or the state. This does not mean that in societies where the political regime is perceived to be illegitimate, civil society organizations can create alternative spheres of power. People may divert their energies into secondary associations to satisfy their basic needs. As such, civil associations may turn into opposition forces against state (Berman, 1997; Hyden, 1997). Nevertheless, in democracies, strengthening civic organizations, which represent the demand side of the political equation, without providing commensurate assistance to the political organizations that must aggregate the interests of those very groups, ultimately damages the democratic equilibrium (Doherty, 2001, p. 25). Gary (1996) presents cases from Africa where civil society ultimately conquered the state. Similarly, Abel and Stephan’s (2000, p. 615) study on civic environmentalism in the United States argues that, “the devolution of environmental policy away from the government does not necessarily lead toward a substantially new role for citizenry.” Therefore, just as the absence of civil society will harm the democratic consolidation process, the absence of the state will also be detrimental to the civil sector.¹

In democratic contexts, therefore, ideal civil society organizations remain in the civil sphere and do not compete with the state for popular loyalty. In turn, the state provides appropriate decision making by ensuring public consultation and adequate representation of relevant parties in terms of policy-making. Offe (1989) suggests that, as public policies exert a more direct and visible impact on citizens, the citizens in turn try to obtain a more immediate and inclusive control over both the process of policy-making and the political elite. The greater opportunity for actors to develop an effective organizational and political capacity to advance their goals, protect their interests, and preserve their values in the democratic institutional environment, the more secure their commitment will be
to that environment (Valenzuela, 1992). Beyond this short discussion, in the next section I will present first how a strong civil society and state both profit from collaboration and second the terms of collaboration.

**PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING: COLLABORATION BETWEEN THE STATE AND CIVIL SOCIETY**

As I have argued so far, this article does not insist that the state and society conflict in the course of policy-making. Patterns of constructive mutual support between state and societal actors are uncommon, but they challenge one-way approaches to state-society relations. In this section, therefore, I shall consider methods for achieving a policy-making balance between the state and society, and the problems that new democracies may face in institutionalizing such a balance.

A healthy relationship between the state and interest organizations is predominantly contingent upon the confluence of state and interest group objectives. With common objectives, the state and interest groups will develop long-term policies more easily. The most constructive possible relationship between interest groups and the state is collaboration. At the very least, the state can guarantee an environment for arbitration that brings together different interest groups. At most, it can promote an interactive network and partnership, which respects independence of interest groups. Rapid conflict resolution and decision making would be the result of such a partnership.

In its attempts to establish a balanced relationship between the state and civil society in terms of policy-making, the collaboration argument differs from previous theories in the following ways:

- It privileges neither the state nor civil society in considerations of strength and autonomy, but looks for ways to strengthen these two simultaneously.
- It does not necessarily believe that state and civil society should operate at the expense of each other, but seeks ways of improving their co-operation.
- It agrees that possible inequalities of resource distribution can only be solved in participative and non-hierarchical environments.
- It looks for comprehensive state and civil society relations without any preferential treatment of one civil organization vis-à-vis the others.

In environments of collaboration, state autonomy and the power of social groups increase and decrease proportionally (Evans, 1996a). Mutual respect between the state and civil society, acceptance of each others’ autonomy and independence, and a plurality of civil society opinions and positions are all inherent to this environment. This form of relationship would decompose myths about government based solely on representative features (Hirst, 1990, 1993) Thus, if a democracy needs to be more inclusive, it can become so by fostering a balanced relationship between the state and civil society. Finally, this collaborative environment would sustain continuous interaction between the public, sociopolitical institutions, and the state—modifying them in certain ways.
It is mistaken to assume that state’s autonomy from society will increase state’s efficacy in policy deliverance. The collaboration argument asserts that this efficacy arises out of the co-operation of the state and civil society organizations during the policy-making processes. Simultaneous state and civil society strength is fundamental to my collaboration argument. Accordingly, I question Putnam’s (1993) treatment of state as an external actor to social relations. A combination of strong state and strong civil society is the basis for responsive, effective democracy, whereas a combination of strong state and weak civil society leads to strong state autonomy, the danger of unresponsiveness and potential for “prerogative state power.” In the combination of a weak state and strong civil society, the result is an overwhelming strain on state capacities, and ineffective state response to the demands of constituencies (Bernhard, 1993, p. 326).

Autonomy of civil society organizations is central to the collaboration argument. I define this autonomy as follows: the relative confidence of civil society in terms of its own power vis-à-vis the political society and in its ability to collaborate with the political society. My earlier research showed that (Korkut 2005, 2006) in new democracies the autonomy of civil society vis-à-vis the state is in peril. Rather than operating in autonomy from the state and political parties, civil society groups in these contexts choose to earn strength with their potential and ability to forge links with the political elite, preferably with those in government. This context exalts civil society organizations’ dependence on the political elite and hence patronage. Furthermore, the result is not necessarily success for civil society organizations (Korkut, 2006). Therefore, the political elite, rather than political institutions, are dominant with respect to the relations between the government and civil society. I will debate this issue in more detail while looking for forms of interaction between the civil society and the state under the conditions imposed by globalization in the last section of my article.

Earlier discussions on collaboration suggested complementarity with embeddedness (Evans, 1997, p. 82; Lam, 1996, p. 1049). Evans’ (1996b, p. 1123) definition of embeddedness requires the direct involvement of public officials in organizing citizen activities. In contrast, this article does not necessarily support Evans’ (1996b, 1997) and Lam’s (1996) discussions of collaboration. This is primarily because the direct involvement of public officials may jeopardize the independence of citizens’ efforts. This conflict is especially possible in those countries where independent interest organizations have been historically absent. In contrast, complementarity supports day-to-day interaction between public officials and civil society. The duty of the state, in this respect, is to assist the citizenry with resources and expertise that would be otherwise unavailable, such as the necessary framework for regular meetings, and then later to maintain a “hands-off” stance with respect to further civil society activities. This hands-off stance will guarantee that synergy, which is a result of embeddedness and complementarity, does not turn into clientelism (Evans 1996a, pp. 1121, 1126).

Given the conditions and forms of relationships between the state and civil society in new democracies, I reckon a need to resort to the earlier literature on clientela as well as parentela literature anew. Clientela and parentela relationships between state and civil society organizations suggest extreme conditions of
proximity between the state and civil society (LaPalombara, 1964 in Peters, 1984, pp. 157–158) and this form of proximity might affect the operation of a balanced relationship between the state and civil society especially in new democracies.

Briefly put, the *clientela* relationship exists when an interest group, for whatever reason, succeeds in becoming, in the eyes of a given administrative agency, the natural expression and representative of a given social sector which, in turn, constitutes the natural target or reference point for the activity of the administrative agency. (LaPalombara, 1964, p. 262)

The implications of this process may be such that, while one group increases its influence on the process of policy-making, the overall influence of pressure groups on public policy will deteriorate. Influential groups with special access to decision makers may initiate policies that they do not necessarily want to discuss or defend. Thus, the interest groups will keep negotiations and interactions private and informal, at the expense of public scrutiny and accountability. In this way, there develops a symbiotic form of dependence between the administrative agency and the interest group. The administrative agency needs information and political support from the interest group, whereas the interest group needs access to decision-making and favorable decisions from the administrative agency (Peters, 1984, pp. 157–158).

*Parentela* relationship, on the other hand, is a situation of kinship or close fraternal ties between the government or the dominant party and the interest group. “It involves a relatively close and integral relationship between certain associational interest groups, on the one hand, and the politically dominant party, on the other” (LaPalombara, 1964, p. 306). Hence, a pressure group gains access to policy-making through its relationship with a political party, rather than through its ability to represent a large fraction of society. If the political party is in power, the interest group obtains access to administrative decision-making through the willingness of the party to intercede on its behalf with the bureaucracy, and therefore to manipulate bureaucratic policy-making. The pressure group has an impact on bureaucratic choice, and both the party and the bureaucracy enjoy the benefits of the pressure groups’ specialized knowledge. (Peters, 1984, p. 162) Such interest groups, consequently, will have attained a prominent place inside the party organization. The result is a policy-making process where technical expertise is weak and a professional/bureaucratic ethos has scarcely developed (Atkinson and Coleman, 1989, p. 84).

Synergy implied by collaboration, however, is more comprehensive than that implied by *clienteles*. It will work alongside state assistance to help a newly democratizing population overcome the preliminary difficulties of representing its interests in an organized manner. Thus, rather than eliminating government agencies, it would be more useful to study how to design government agencies that complement and collaborate with citizens’ efforts in the broader institutional settings of policy-making (Lam, 1996, p. 1040).

Conversely, dialogue with the civil sector may be unproductive where the state-civil society relationship is too cozy. This is the case with *clienteles* and *parentelas*.
relationship, which I discussed earlier. In excessively comfortable relationships with the state, civil society groups may accept government information and coordinating influence too readily. By not questioning state activities, they may fail to consider grassroots perspective (Clark, 1997, pp. 47–48, 54–56). Interest groups’ pursuit of their interests through overt alliances with political parties may be a dangerous strategy, as I discussed earlier (see Korkut, 2005, 2006). Moreover, sustaining or else forging institutional frameworks during the transition to democracy appears to be a difficult task. Despite the emphasis in transition studies on the importance of institution building for successful democratic consolidation (Huntington, 1991; Przeworski, 1992; Zielonka, 2001, vol. 1), it is usually the case that a considerable gap develops between formal institutions and informal practices in new democracies. Due to the prevalence of patron–client links, institutions do not guarantee impartiality; the party in power, collaborating with its client in civil society, can act at the expense of those excluded from the power circles.

This suggests that informalities and patron–client relations prevail over established institutional frameworks (Kéri, 1994, p. 92) during the maturation of democracy in transitional political environments. Therefore, while institutions remain little more than abstract, informal links become concrete. With respect to the process of policy-making, a worst-case scenario would be a government’s establishment of a tripartite council for the purpose of exerting greater control over the policies and public pronouncements of its social partners (Héthy and Kyloh, 1995, p. 9). In contrast, this article argues that both collaboration and institutionalization of participation are indispensable to the maturation of democracy.

In summary, in this section I argued that an institution’s power would have to be partially controlled by an external agent (Laclau and Zac, 1994, p. 20). This applies both to state and civil society. Hence, a balanced state and civil society action to guarantee egalitarian participation is necessary in democratic societies. This balance will also ensure that neither state nor civil society would be a threat to the other’s existence. In the light of this claim, I shall now consider the second stage of participation: routes of member participation in internal decision-making of organizations.

**PARTICIPATORY CIVIL SOCIETY**

We cannot take for granted that civil society organizations will be democratic by default. A fundamental assumption is that, while citizen participation in governing provides justifiable grounds for governmental action, deliberative decision-making within the organizations justifies civil society action on the grounds that deliberative process is democratic (Ash, 1996). Still, civil society is at best, politically neutral: neither inherently good nor inherently bad, but rather dependent for its effect on the wider political context. Authoritarian tendencies are also possible within civil society organizations. Respectively, Rossteutscher (2002) argues that,

[associations are a microcosm of society at large; in a sufficiently democratic environment their impact generally will be democratic, in an undemocratic society their impact might well be very undemocratic. This is the case because}
associations do not advocate a certain type of culture but reflect and amplify the dominant cultural traits of their environment: they are not democracy’s avant-garde but political culture’s mirror. (p. 515)

Democracy expects civil society organizations to develop healthy cross-cutting identities that encourage tolerance and compromise. This expectation imposes considerable responsibilities on civil society organizations. The embracing of democratic values demonstrates to the public that it is entitled to certain rights and privileges. Collective participation shapes the “consciousness” of the public as it shapes its interests, its commitments and its political awareness. Thus, bonds of mutual solidarity, rather than vertical bonds of dependency, will develop to produce trust and co-operation. An organization’s members develop an appreciation of democratic values through socialization, participation, and the egalitarian distribution of resources (Waltzer, 1995). Hence, associational life in general—and habits of associations in particular—foster patterns of civility in actions of citizens in a democratic polity (Putnam, 1993).

Some internal features are specific to a participatory civil society. Participatory civil society requires horizontal organizational structures, open routes of participation for their constituencies, all-encompassing membership procedures and policies, a clear representational domain, and pro-democratic rhetoric and structure if it is to sustain an independent course of action. Horizontal decision-making procedures give an equal voice to each member of an organization while providing the organization’s leadership with information about members. Only those civil societies that create cross-cutting cleavages and a consciousness of common interests will produce the necessary patterns of healthy democratic governance (Moe, 1980, pp. 40–41).

Civil society benefits from social networks of weak and hence permeable social boundaries, because such networks do not obstruct cooperation. The importance of the institutionalization of participatory civil society lies in the fact that social networks transmit innovative information and values, as well as assist social learning within transitional polities (Berman, 1997). A strong civic community arises from firm civic engagement, widespread political equality, appreciated solidarity, trust, tolerance, well-placed social structures, and co-operation. Such a community can be expected to support democracy. On the other hand, a civil society undermined by radical individualism, social anomie, and greed will fail to build effective avenues of citizen participation (Gibson, 1998). Civil societies must not privilege certain strata or tolerate rent-seeking behavior (Kamrawa and O’Mora, 1998). Uncivil society appears either in the absence of social networks, or in a society of firm, but closed social networks.

The health of a civil society democracy requires the creation and defense of organizational structures and conditions that allow minority or opposition groups to arise as needed (Benson, 1986, p. 368). Granted structural features by themselves cannot create internal democracy, but, at the very least, they would promote an environment of tolerance toward opposition and participation (Lipset, 1961, p. 50). Structurally established possibilities for participation are advantageous where a strong organization is present to mobilize member participation. The probability of
this mobilization depends on the strength of organizations at the societal level, their organizational penetration and the mobilization efforts of their leaders (Stephens, 1980, pp. 76–77, 247, 253). To conclude, the greater the influence of the membership, and the greater the membership’s participation, the more difficult it will be for an oligarchy to enforce policies and actions that conflict with members’ values or needs (Lipset, 1960, p. 237) in civil society organizations.

THE IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATORY POLICY-MAKING AND CIVIL SOCIETY IN NEW DEMOCRACIES IN THE AGE OF GLOBALIZATION

So far in this article I draw attention to the assets of a participatory civil society as well as a policy-making environment. In line with the general theme of this issue, my argument was that the evolution of sustainable societies to embody a civil and democratic consciousness entails appropriating the citizens of those societies with equal participatory opportunities. Nevertheless, this article demonstrated that in new democracies dominance of political elite as regards the relations between the government and civil societies as well as feeble institutions at the face of prevalent informal links endanger an evolution as such. The uncertainties of regime change in these contexts have fostered an ever-greater reliance on networks and informal links (Sik and Wellman 1999, p. 225). In certain cases, as Arató (1990) put it, “the aims of elite democracy and economic liberalism virtually coincided [during the democratic consolidation period], and the greatest enemy was an organized civil society.” It is noteworthy that economic liberalism is perceived by many as a cause of poverty and exploitation. In new democracies, there is a major part of the society that considers corruption and legal irregularities also results of economic liberalism. The recent rise of political parties, as an example in Poland and Romania, mostly with a conservative agenda but placing an emphasis on “law” and “justice” in their electoral propaganda certainly reflects the parties’ efforts to respond to such considerations. Given this context one needs to ask whether globalization as such is prone to endanger evolution of sustainable societies even further despite the common expectancy that it will represent an opportunity structure for the citizenry at large.

Feeble institutions and weak states do not mean strong civil society groups. Moreover, they do not guarantee efficient transnational links for a global civil society either. In most of the cases, transnational links are those of the business elite. This process paves the way toward an overrepresentation of the interests of the multinational firms. In an environment as such the current political elite becomes captive of the multinational capital. As a result, the uneducated and untrained labor force did not receive their share from development. The bright statistics of economic development from the new democracies (especially in the Central and Eastern European states) only favor the upper classes. Finally, there is no sign from the part of the upper classes that they care much about poverty (Szalai, 2001). Hence, despite the transformative mechanisms of globalization, a social structure composed of two more and more detached groups: those who are able to keep up with the changes and those who lose ground for good is still
effective. The extension of civil rights in new democracies will not mean much for those who have no right to have some insight or a word in the crucial decisions.

The picture is still not as gruesome as it looks. The transnational civil society organizations are also active in the new democracies. They will enhance their strength and success to an extent that they can convey their messages to the masses and establish efficient links with their local partners. In certain authoritarian contexts, such as Russia and the Central Asian states, activities of transnational civil society groups are viewed by suspicion by the local authorities. In other contexts, as the latest democratic developments in Serbia, Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan showed, transnational civil society groups actively helped emergence of democracy. It is also worth noting the success of transnational civil society groups to plant themselves in the Central and Eastern European states in the 1990s and their contribution to the consolidation of democracy in this region.

My argument in this article was that the relative success of civil society groups will depend on the extent to which they could collaborate with the state and operate and effective participatory internal decision making for their members. I also mentioned an important role for the state in this picture. Under the conditions of globalization, democratic states should also be willing to cooperate with the transnational civil society organizations. The latter in this context should also relate itself to the local environment and needs. It should operate democratically. Evolution of sustainable societies will profit from such an environment to an extent that the majority of the population will expose itself to a global world and will engage in struggles to transform the prevailing socioeconomic systems.

NOTES

1. Also see Jones (2000) on Georgia, where the rapid withdrawal of the state from major sectors of economic life undermined the ability of the majority of population to participate in policy-making. For a discussion on Central American countries on this issue, see Fitzsimmons and Anner (1999) and Goma and Font (1996).

2. Evans (1996b, p. 1119) makes a differentiation between two forms of synergy: (1) synergy based on complementary actions by government and citizens and (2) synergy based on ties that cross the public–private divide (embeddedness). Chazan (1994), in return, called this relationship a symbiotic relationship. I do not see any difference between Evans’ definition of synergy and Chazan’s definition of symbiotic relationship between the state and society.

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