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Toward Democratic Consolidation

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In lieu of an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

Toward Democratic Consolidation

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In this third wave of global democratization, no phenomenon has more vividly captured the imagination of democratic scholars, observers, and activists alike than "civil society." What could be more moving than the

stories of brave bands of students, writers, artists, pastors, teachers, laborers, and mothers challenging the duplicity, corruption, and brutal domination of authoritarian states? Could any sight be more awe-inspiring to democrats than the one they saw in Manila in 1986, when hundreds of thousands of organized and peaceful citizens surged into the streets to reclaim their stolen election and force Ferdinand Marcos out through nonviolent "people power"?

In fact, however, the overthrow of authoritarian regimes through popularly based and massively mobilized democratic opposition has not been the norm. Most democratic transitions have been protracted and negotiated (if not largely controlled from above by the exiting authoritarians). Yet even in such negotiated and controlled transitions, the stimulus for democratization, and particularly the pressure to complete the process, have typically come from the "resurrection of civil society," the restructuring of public space, and the mobilization of all manner of independent groups and grassroots movements.¹

If the renewed interest in civil society can trace its theoretical origins to Alexis de Tocqueville, it seems emotionally and spiritually indebted to Jean-Jacques Rousseau for its romanticization of "the people" as a force for collective good, rising up to assert the democratic will against a narrow and evil autocracy. Such images of popular **[End Page 4]** mobilization suffuse contemporary thinking about democratic change throughout Asia, Latin America, Eastern Europe, and Africa—and not without reason.

In South Korea, Taiwan, Chile, Poland, China, Czechoslovakia, South Africa, Nigeria, and Benin (to give only a partial list), extensive mobilization of civil society was a crucial source of pressure for democratic change. Citizens pressed their challenge to autocracy not merely as individuals, but as members of student movements, churches, professional associations, women's groups, trade unions, human rights organizations, producer groups, the press, civic associations, and the like.

It is now clear that to comprehend democratic change around the

world, one must study civil society. Yet such study often provides a one-dimensional and dangerously misleading view. Understanding civil society's role in the construction of democracy requires more complex conceptualization and nuanced theory. The simplistic antinomy between state and civil society, locked in a zero-sum struggle, will not do. We need to specify more precisely what civil society is and is not, and to identify its wide variations in form and character. We need to comprehend not only the multiple ways it can serve democracy, but also the tensions and contradictions it generates and may encompass. We need to think about the features of civil society that are most likely to serve the development and consolidation of democracy. And, not least, we need to form a more realistic picture of the limits of civil society's potential contributions to democracy, and thus of the relative emphasis that democrats should place on building civil society among the various challenges of democratic consolidation.

What Civil Society Is and Is Not

Civil society is conceived here as the *realm of organized social life that is voluntary, self-generating, (largely) self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules*. It is distinct from "society" in general in that it involves citizens *acting collectively in a public sphere* to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable. Civil society is an intermediary entity, standing between the private sphere and the state. Thus it excludes individual and family life, inward-looking group activity (e.g., for recreation, entertainment, or spirituality), the profit-making enterprise of individual business firms, and political efforts to take control of the state. Actors in civil society need the protection of an institutionalized legal order to guard their autonomy and freedom of action. Thus civil society not only restricts state power but legitimates state authority when that authority is based on the rule of law. When the state itself is lawless and contemptuous of individual and group **[End Page...**



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