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THE WEAKNESS OF POST-COMMUNIST CIVIL  
SOCIETY REASSESSED

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## ABSTRACT

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During the last two decades, scholars from a variety of disciplines have argued that civil society is structurally deficient in post-communist countries. Yet why have the seemingly strong, active and mobilized civic movements of the transition period become so weak after democracy was established? And why have there been diverging political trajectories across the post-communist space if civil society structures were universally weak? This paper uses a wide range of data from various available sources to show that civil societies in Central and Eastern European countries are not as feeble as is commonly assumed. Some post-communist countries possess vigorous public spheres, and active civil society organizations strongly connected to transnational civic networks able to shape domestic policies. Following the calls by Anheier (2004) and Bernhard and Karakoç (2007) we adopt a multidimensional approach to the measurement of civil society. In a series of cross-section time-series models, we show that our broader measures of civic and social institutions are able to predict the diverging transition paths among post-communist regimes, and in particular the growing gap between democratic East Central Europe and the increasingly authoritarian post-Soviet space.

## THE WEAKNESS OF POST-COMMUNIST CIVIL SOCIETY REASSESSED

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“Many of the formerly Communist societies had weak civic traditions before the advent of Communism, and totalitarian rule abused even that limited stock of social capital. Without norms of reciprocity and networks of civic engagement, the Hobbesian outcome of the *Mezzogiorno* – amoral familialism, clientelism, lawlessness, ineffective government, and economic stagnation – seems likelier than successful democratization and economic development. Palermo may represent the future of Moscow.”

- Robert Putnam, *Making Democracy Work*, 1993, p. 183

During the last two decades, scholars from a variety of disciplines have argued that civil society is structurally deficient in post-communist countries (Lomax 1997, Ely 1994, Staniszkis 1999, Jawlowska and Kubik 2007, *Civil Society Forum* 2009). Early studies of ‘social capital’ conducted in the 1990s found lower levels of social trust, community engagement, and confidence in social and political institutions across Central and Eastern Europe (Rose 1999, Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1996). More recent analyses by Howard (2003) Bernhard and Karakoç (2007) and Wallace, Pichler and Haerpfer (2012) have shown low levels of voluntary associational membership and weak unconventional participation. The picture of even the most successful post-communist countries that arises from the literature is one of ‘democracies without citizens’, in which elites have succeeded in institutionalizing democratic procedures, protection of basic civic rights, and multiparty competition, but failed to counter a paucity of associational life, volunteering at the grassroots level and weak participation in the institutions of representative governance. Weak civil society spells trouble for these new democracies. Warning of the dangers to democratic consolidation, some authors have pointed to declining legitimacy of democratic institutions, disenchantment with liberal values, and

the growing popularity of populist and radical right parties (Ramet 1999, Minkenberg 2002, Kopecky and Mudde 2003, Rupnik 2007).

Yet if we take the conventional wisdom regarding the weakness of post-communist civil society at its face value, this seems to generate a number of paradoxes. First, the events of 1989-1991 were initially considered as the undisputable triumph of civil society over monolithic communist regimes: why, therefore, have the seemingly strong, active and mobilized civic movements of the transition period become so weak after democracy was established? Second, given that communist regimes did not simply repress independent social and political organizations, but actively built their own associational structures, what happened to these structures during and after the transition period? And finally, if civil society matters for democratic consolidation but is uniformly weak, why are there diverging political trajectories across the post-communist space, with post-Soviet regimes lapsing into authoritarian rule while those of East Central Europe hold to the path of democratic consolidation?

We suggest these paradoxes are easily resolved once we depart from the consensus view that civil society is weak and structurally deficient in post-communist Europe. Because existing studies have focused exclusively on membership levels in voluntary associations as reflected in public opinion surveys at the expense of other dimensions of civic life and other types of empirical data, they have neglected the myriad ways in which citizens organize to defend their interests, reaffirm their identities and pursue common goals. Thus in order to map up the actual state and development of civil society in the region we need to follow calls by Anheier (2004) and Bernhard and Karakoç (2007) to adopt a multidimensional approach to the measurement of civil society. We also need to focus on really existing civil societies (Alexander 2006) and expand types of data and research

strategies to identify emerging forms of civil society and their impact on politics in formerly communist countries. We argue that using a wide range of data from various available sources and more in-depth empirical analysis, it can be shown that civil societies in Central and Eastern European countries are not as feeble as is commonly assumed. Some post-communist countries developed vigorous public spheres and have active civil society organizations strongly connected to transnational civic networks able to shape domestic policies. The diversity of outcomes among post-communist regimes, and in particular the growing gap between democratic East Central Europe and the increasingly authoritarian post-Soviet space (Ekiert, Kubik and Vachudova 2007), reflect in part patterns of civil society development and is mirrored by the diversity in civic and social institutions, reflecting different historical legacies, political trajectories, and cultural traditions.

### **The Weakness of Civil Society Thesis**

By the late 1990s, scholars from a range of disciplines appeared to have reached a consensus on the systemic weakness of civil society in post-communist Europe (Dahrendorf 1990, Bernhard 1996, Howard 2003). Some attributed this to a direct legacy of communism, arguing that 'the lack of civil society was part of the very essence of the all-pervasive communist state' (Wedel 1994: 323). Others attributed it to the weak civic traditions before the outset of communist rule and only reinforced by it (Putnam 1993). Still others argued that, while the legacy of communism was undoubtedly negative, it was compounded by the manner in which the post-1989 democratic transformations occurred: pacted transitions privileged elite negotiations at the expense of popular forces, and organizational leadership of emerging popular movements was lost through migration to the new state bureaucracies and party hierarchies,

and structural adjustment and austerity led to widespread withdrawal from associational life (Bernhard 1996, Lomax 1997, Howard 2003). Thus, the rebellious civil societies that challenged communist governments in the region subsequently became enfeebled, as a result of factors inherent in the nature of the dual economic and political transformation occurring across the post-communist space.

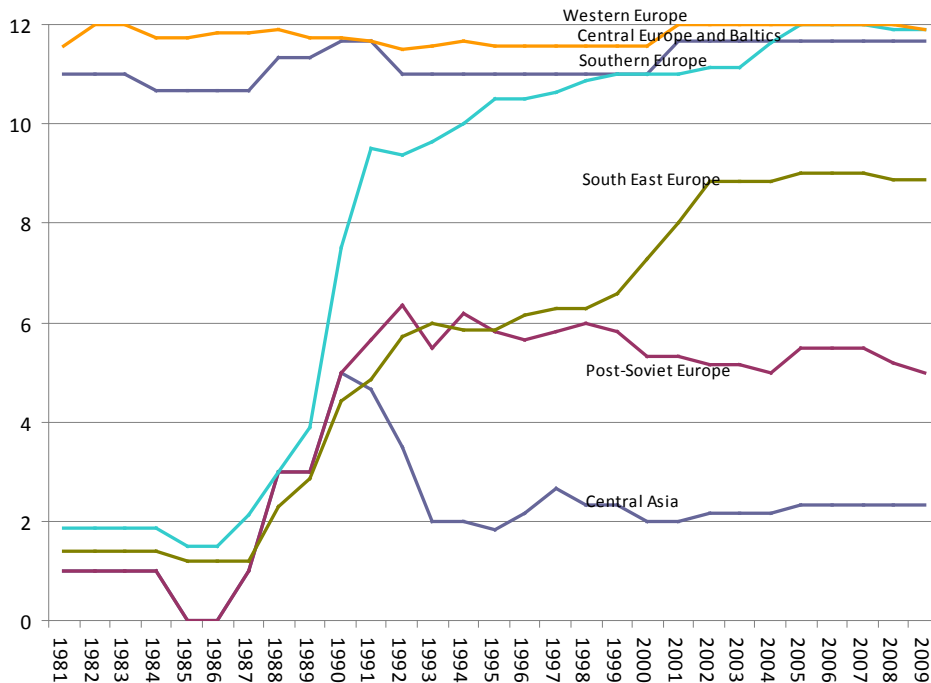
Notwithstanding this assessment, however, since 1989 most countries of the region have experienced steady democratic consolidation. A glance at the Freedom House rankings illustrates both the overall progress and the contrasting trajectories of political transformations (Figure 1).

Outside of Central Asia, less than 15 per cent of post-communist regimes are considered 'not free,' according to the ratings published by Freedom House (Freedom House 2008), and, in a number of post-communist polities, the quality of democracy is very high, with many countries in Central Europe and the Baltics exhibiting better ratings on indices of corruption, public service delivery, and business regulation than their counterparts in Southern Europe (Worldwide Governance Indicators 2009, Doing Business Indicators 2010, Transparency International 2010). Thus if it is true, that civil society is an indispensable element of the development and consolidation of democracy<sup>1</sup>, how can we explain how democracy has flourished in parts of the former Soviet bloc, despite the apparent weakness of the associational sphere and passivity of citizens described by scholars?

Comparisons of the state of civil society in post-communist countries, we would respond, have been based on a relatively small number of indicators, which has

1 See, for example, Shils 1991; Diamond 1999; Rosenblum and Park 2002 for arguments on the role of civil society and for a skeptical evaluation of such claims see Berman 1997 and Bermeo (2003, pp. 8-11). See also Fung 2003 Alagappa 2004.

**Figure 1: Civil rights and political liberties in Europe 1981-2009**



Source: Freedom House.

Country coding: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia (Central Europe and Baltics); Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia (South East Europe); Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (Central Asia); Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine (Post-Soviet Europe); Greece, Portugal, Spain (Southern Europe); Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom (Western Europe).

led to a false impression of the depth and robustness of post-communist associational life. Early studies of ‘social capital’ in post-communist countries conducted in the 1990s, for example, utilized survey instruments for social trust, community engagement, and confidence in social institutions, all of which were reported to be lower in Central and Eastern Europe than in the West (Rose 1999, Rose, Mishler and Haerpfer 1996, Wallace, Pischler and Haerpfer 2012). Howard (2003) pointed to data collected as part of the 1995-7 World Values Surveys, showing low levels of voluntary association across all countries in the region, and across many categories of associational membership. Much of the weakness of civil society argument hinges upon these measures, and related questions in the European and the International Social Surveys (ESS 2003-7, ISSP 1988-, WVS 1981-2007). In general, there remains a strik-

ing disconnect between the richness of the theoretical literature on civil society, and the narrow nature of the data collected and reported in discussions of civic society in post-communist Europe. Important dimensions, such as institutional infrastructure, the quality of public space, access to the media and the degree of political information, connections to global civil society, or the frequency and effectiveness of protest and contentious political activity, are almost entirely absent (Bernhard and Karakoç 2007). Civil society is a multidimensional phenomenon and needs to be measured as such.

In this paper we employ a broad, realistic, and empirically sensitive notion of civil society. Following Diamond (1999, 221), we define it as “the realm of organized social life that is open, voluntary, self-gen-

## Civil societies in Post-communist world

### *The Organizational Structure of Civil Society*

Studies of civil society in post-communist Europe have tended to rely on simple surveys of voluntary activity, where respondents are asked to report the different kinds of association in which they participate, rather than studies of organizational composition of civil society and density of organizations across space and time. This has led to an excessive focus upon individuals instead of the organizations within which they operate as well as to the neglect of the associational sphere that existed under the communist rule and its transformations after 1989.

It has also led to a little-noticed inconsistency in the data on organizational membership in post-communist states. On the one hand, comparative survey data from the European Social Survey or the European Values Survey has shown a consistently low level of reported group membership, with little or no change over time (Table 3). On the other hand, official registries from within individual countries show a phenomenal growth of listed groups and organizations (Nagy and Sebesteny 2008; Mansfeldova et al 2004; Kuti 2010). In Poland, for example, the number of registered NGOs grew by 400 percent from 1989 to 1994 (Figure 2).

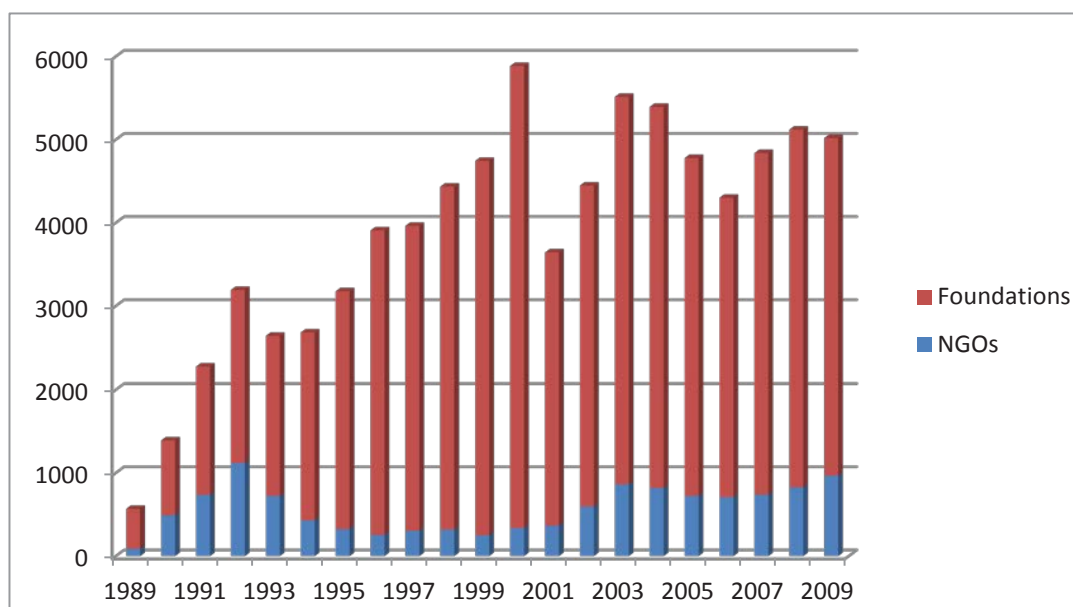
While the growth leveled after that point, it has remained strong in the subsequent years, with an average addition of some 4000 new NGOs, and 500 foundations, every year, across all types or organizations (Table 1), in all regions of the country. The development of civil society organizations has been distributed across the entire range of localities and not restricted to major urban centers<sup>2</sup>.

2 In big cities (over half a million inhabitants) there 24.1% registered NGOs, in villages 19.7%, in small cities (up to 99

erating, at least partially self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound by a legal order or set of shared rules.... it involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, preferences, and ideas, to exchange information, to achieve collective goals, to make demands on the state, to improve the structure and functioning of the state, and to hold state officials accountable.” Given the emerging consensus that civil society is a multidimensional and interactive phenomenon (Bermeo and Nord, eds. 2000; Merkel 2002; Anheier 2004), we assume that really existing civil societies differ along at least four crucial dimensions: the quality of the public sphere, civil society’s composition and organization, its interaction with other institutional domains and actors of the polity, and normative orientation of civil society actors. Specific dimensions or sectors of civil society in various countries may exhibit different levels of development and different qualities and thus their impact on democratization (or the improvement of democracy’s quality) may vary considerably. Accordingly, only multiple data and multiple methodologies can generate substantive knowledge about civil society and way in which it shapes political outcomes.

Taking a broader sample of indicators, we argue, it is possible to build a picture of civil society that better reflects the richness and diversity of citizen activity across post-communist countries, and also helps us to understand the diverging trajectories of post-1989 political and economic developments. In the following section we will focus on each of these four dimensions presenting various empirical data that may allow us to judge the condition of civil society across the post-communist region.

**Figure 2: Growth of NGOs and Foundations in Poland**



Perhaps this trend is unique to Poland and other East Central European countries (Kuti 1996 and 2010, Mansfeldova et al 2004, Nagy and Sebesteny 2008); yet further evidence of civil society organizational

growth across the region can be adduced from data on membership of international non-governmental organizations. A measure of per capita membership of international NGOs, for example, is reported in the LSE Global Civil Society Yearbook (LSE 2000-4), and shows a massive surge in civic organization among post-communist societies in the decade from 1993 to 2003 (Figure 3).

thousand inhabitants) 34.7% and larger in cities (100-499 thousand inhabitants) 21.5% (Gasior-Niemiec and Glinski 2007a, 246). While, there is a considerable controversy how many of these registered organizations still exist and how active there are (reference), the rate of NGO creation when combine with other measures provide a testimony to the considerable vitality of civil society.

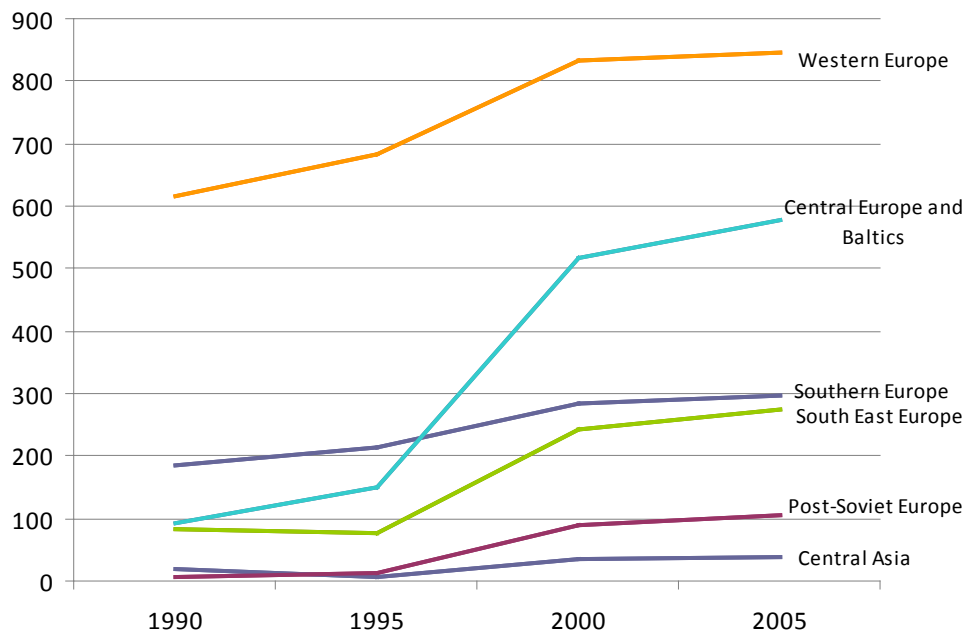
**Table 1: Growth across types of organizations in Poland**

Type of organization	2002	2008
NGOs (stowarzyszenia)	36,500	63,500
Foundations	5,000	9,500
Voluntary Fire Brigades	12,500	15,000
Social organizations (PTA, etc.)	6,650	4,000
Trade Unions	15,700	19,500
Religious organizations	14,800	15,500
Professional and employer associations	4,250	5,500
Sport clubs	4,300	6,000
Number of Organizations	99,700	138,500

Source: Klon/Jawor, GUS. Data do not include all organizations that comprise broadly define civil society and include some that may not be active.



**Figure 3. International NGO membership density (per million population)**



Source: LSE Global Civil Society Yearbook (2000-3).

Country coding: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia (Central Europe and Baltics); Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia (South East Europe); Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (Central Asia); Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine (Post-Soviet Europe); Greece, Portugal, Spain (Southern Europe); Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom (Western Europe).

During the first decade and a half following the collapse of communism, central Europe rapidly overtook southern Europe in terms of the density of international NGOs, and is now converging on Western Europe in this regard. Meanwhile, Southeastern Europe is now approaching the consolidated democracies of southern Europe in the richness and diversity of international organizations active in the country. The data indicates not only rapid change over time, but also a widening gap between regions of the former communist bloc, with a clear divide emerging between post-Soviet Europe and the other countries of the former Eastern bloc.

If the growth of new civil society organizations during the transition period has remained invisible to

public opinion surveys, so too have the associations inherited from the former regime. Classic studies of communist regimes always emphasized their high organizational density and mobilizational capacity, as citizens were forced or encouraged to join party-state controlled mass organizations, spanning the entire spectrum of activities from leisure, to the professional sphere, to neighborhood life, to high politics (Linz 1975, Kubik 2000: 184-85). These organizations were dubbed “transmission belts” since they allowed the center of power to reach and control all citizens (Selznik 1962). Moreover, researchers in the region showed that a non-trivial number of pre-communist organizations survived under communist rule. While the authorities tightly controlled such organizations, they were able to protect their specific traditions and continued to perform many of their traditional so-

cial functions (Kurczewska 2004; Kurczewski 2003, Gasiór-Niemiec and Gliniski 2007a). If communist regimes had such a dense state-imposed associational life in the communist past, what happened to these organizations in the process of transition? It is especially puzzling why the presence of surviving old and emerging new organizations should not be detected in survey data on group membership, which consistently shows Central and Eastern European societies to be among the least organizationally dense in the world (Bernhard and Karakoç, 2007).

The most common interpretation of this finding is that there was ‘civic demobilization’ following the end of communism. Communist regimes were successful in maintaining a high level of membership in associations only via threat of sanctions and withdrawal of various benefits that were distributed through various associations. Thus, the collapse of communist systems was followed by widespread withdrawal from communist era organizations and aversion to joining new ones. Moreover, the withdrawal from associational life was also attributed to the severity of the economic crisis and loss of leadership civil society activists migrated to politics and state administration (Bernhard 1996). This is the claim advanced by Howard (2003), who compares levels of voluntary organizational membership from the 1990 and 1995 World Values Surveys, and re-

ports that most post-communist societies have fallen in ranking when compared with post-authoritarian regimes. Support for this thesis is adduced from data showing that rates of volunteering are very low in the region in comparison to old EU countries (Nalecz and Bartkowski 2006). However, more focused opinion polls usually show higher levels of volunteering than general surveys such as the International or the European Social Survey. For example, the numbers reported by Gaskin and Smith (1997) for two post-communist countries are not strikingly lower than the numbers for Western European countries. Systematic surveys in Poland also registered a relatively high, although fluctuating, level of volunteering and charitable giving (CBOS 2010a, 2010b, 2010c).

The argument is advanced further with the help of data from the Post-Communist Organizational Membership Study (PCOMS), which shows slight declines in organizational membership in two post-communist countries (Eastern Germany and Russia) from 1995-1999 (Howard 2003).

Revisiting this issue with the benefit of the more recent 2005-2007 wave of the World Values Surveys, however, allows us to gain a more complete picture of change in time across the region (Table 3).

**Table 2. Volunteers as Percentage of Adult Population in Europe 1995**

Country	Volunteers
Belgium	32%
<b>Bulgaria</b>	19%
Denmark	28%
Germany	18%
Great Britain	34%
Ireland	25%
Netherlands	38%
<b>Slovenia</b>	36%
Sweden	36%

Source: Gaskin and Smith 1997.

**Table 3. Average ‘Active Membership’ of Civic Organizations, 1995-2005**

	Average memberships, 1995	Average memberships, 2005	Change (abs.)	Percentage Change
Ukraine	1.50	3.13	1.63	+108.3
Slovenia	4.50	8.38	3.88	+86.1
Moldova	4.25	6.00	1.75	+41.2
Serbia	2.50	2.88	0.38	+15.0
Russia	2.25	2.38	0.13	+5.6
Bulgaria	1.75	1.38	-0.38	-21.4
Germany (East)	7.75	5.13	-2.63	-33.9
Romania	5.75	2.00	-3.75	-65.2

Source: World Values Surveys, waves 3 and 5 (1994-1998 and 2005-7).

While the changes from 1995-7 to 2000-7 are relatively slight, they do not support the hypothesis that civil society has undergone any recent weakening in post-communist Europe. Confirming the comparison of WVS and PCOMS data in Howard’s analysis (2003), East Germany exhibits a downward shift, with a 33.8% decline in organizational membership over the decade; also on a clear downtrend is Romania, where average active organizational membership has declined from 5.75 per person to just 2, largely driven by a surprising fall in religious association. On the other hand Russia, which is shown in the PCOMS data as having a slight decline from 1995-1999, ends virtually unchanged over the decade, with an increase of 5 per cent up until the latest survey in 2006, while in other cases voluntary associational membership has clearly increased. Average voluntary membership more than doubling in Ukraine and increasing by 86 per cent in Slovenia. As these changes are from a very low base, they should not be over-interpreted; but at any rate they do not support a hypothesis of civic disengagement or ‘stagnation’ in post-communist Europe<sup>3</sup>.

3 However, in accordance with the view that totalitarian societies were particularly devastating in terms of their impact upon ‘private’ civic life involving religious, recreational, or social activities, the areas of civic association which have seen the fastest recovery in the post-communist era are precisely in apolitical organizations such as sports clubs, cultural groups and (apart from Romania) religious organizations.

It may be the case, however, that withdrawal from associations did occur quite rapidly immediately following the collapse of the socialist regime, before data collection for the third wave of the World Values Surveys began in 1994. Data from the most recent wave of the European Social Survey, collected in 2006, includes an item on whether respondents are currently or formerly members of trade unions - an integral feature of the ‘transmission belt’ linking the party and society under communist rule. The results show that in all of the former Communist countries, between a fifth (in Poland) and over half of all respondents (in Estonia and the Ukraine) have left the unions which were so encompassing during the communist era (Table 4).

The figures shown in Table 4 do indeed suggest that, in the immediate aftermath of transition, there was indeed a partial withdrawal from the mass associations of the communist state. However, the trade union movement did not collapse entirely; while the levels of membership in trade unions declined significantly over the last two decades, the resultant level is not much different from the European average (Visser 2006). This is particularly the case when one notes the outlier position of the Scandinavian countries, compared against the western European nations that

**Table 4. Are You a Member of a Trade Union?**

	Yes, currently	Yes, previously	No
Denmark	63.13	21.92	14.95
Sweden	55.75	20.75	23.5
Finland	50.21	22.15	27.64
Norway	41.25	19.34	39.42
Belgium	32.48	17.46	50.06
Austria	19.1	18.63	62.28
Ireland	18.97	23.85	57.18
Ukraine	18.62	51.66	29.72
Netherlands	18.06	11.47	70.47
Cyprus	17.22	16.29	66.49
Slovenia	16.87	34.63	48.5
Russian Federation	15.72	47.53	36.75
United Kingdom	15.61	29.3	55.09
Switzerland	11.89	9.5	78.61
Hungary	10.21	40.32	49.47
Slovakia	9.89	38.68	51.44
Germany	9.51	27.08	63.4
Spain	8.5	7.49	84.01
Estonia	7.15	50.83	42.03
France	6.55	15.96	77.49
Portugal	5.92	9.04	85.04
Poland	5.72	21.53	72.75
Bulgaria	5.36	46.84	47.8

Source: European Social Survey, Wave 3 (2004). Former communist countries highlighted.

have a legacy of authoritarian rule, such as Portugal, Germany, or Spain, the former communist countries of central and eastern Europe perform relatively well. Moreover, membership in other (especially professional) associations remained relatively stable, as the data from Poland suggests (Table 5).

In general, therefore, we appear to find a disparity between comparative survey projects, which reveal low rates of reported voluntary activity, and a wealth of organizational data from official registries and international non-governmental organizations which

imply a dense and growing civic life. What can explain this inconsistency? While we cannot be sure of an ultimately adequate response to this question, one suggestion may be that one needs to examine the meaning of voluntary association in the post-communist context. Due to the legacy of state-mobilized engagement under communist rule and widespread distaste for formal membership in any association, there may be a large survey response bias in post-communist countries that leads household survey instruments to underestimate the true level of participation in associational life. This is the only way that it is possible to reconcile the exceptionally low

**Table 5. Membership in selected associations in Poland**

	Yes, currently	Yes, previously	No
Denmark	63.13	21.92	14.95
Sweden	55.75	20.75	23.5
Finland	50.21	22.15	27.64
Norway	41.25	19.34	39.42
Belgium	32.48	17.46	50.06
Austria	19.1	18.63	62.28
Ireland	18.97	23.85	57.18
Ukraine	18.62	51.66	29.72
Netherlands	18.06	11.47	70.47
Cyprus	17.22	16.29	66.49
Slovenia	16.87	34.63	48.5
Russian Federation	15.72	47.53	36.75
United Kingdom	15.61	29.3	55.09
Switzerland	11.89	9.5	78.61
Hungary	10.21	40.32	49.47
Slovakia	9.89	38.68	51.44
Germany	9.51	27.08	63.4
Spain	8.5	7.49	84.01
Estonia	7.15	50.83	42.03
France	6.55	15.96	77.49
Portugal	5.92	9.04	85.04
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Bulgaria	5.36	46.84	47.8

Source: Polish Statistical Office.

(and volatile) levels of surveyed voluntary activity with the stable and rising official registries of NGOs and NGO membership, without questioning the reliability of the latter, or the myriad other indicators we have presented suggesting a more robust civic life in the region than is commonly assumed.

### *The Behavior of Civil Society Actors*

As observed by Bernhard and Karakoç (2007), studies of civil society have tended to focus on apoliti-

cal aspects of associational life, such as membership in voluntary organizations, to the exclusion of the active political behaviors, such as demonstrations, strikes or petition, which are more directly relevant to explaining institutional outcomes. A greater focus on protest activity would also be consistent with a long tradition in behavioral political science focusing upon elite-challenging activities (Dalton 2008, Norris 1999 2002), as well as empirical studies linking expressive values and democratic outcomes (Inglehart and Welzel 2005).

In their study of contention during initial years of political and economic transformations, Ekiert and

Kubik (1998) noted striking differences among four Central European countries in number of protests sponsored by civil society organizations (Figure 4). They argued that while some civil societies in the region could be described as ‘accommodating’, others were clearly ‘confrontational,’ and as such characterized by frequent strikes, demonstrations, and other contentious activities.

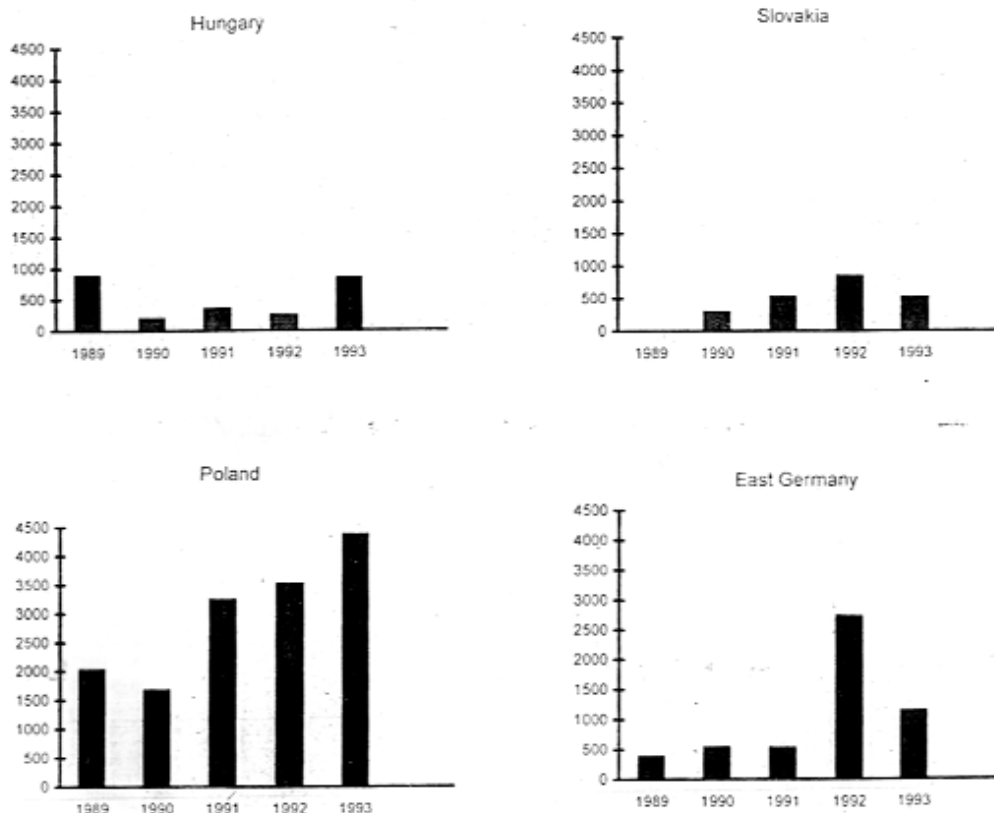
These trends tend to persist overtime suggesting that specific traits of civil society behavior are reproduced and persist for long periods. Data for contentious behavior in Poland and Hungary illustrate well this regularity.

Other data suggest that participation in contentious events, such as demonstration or strikes, has fallen

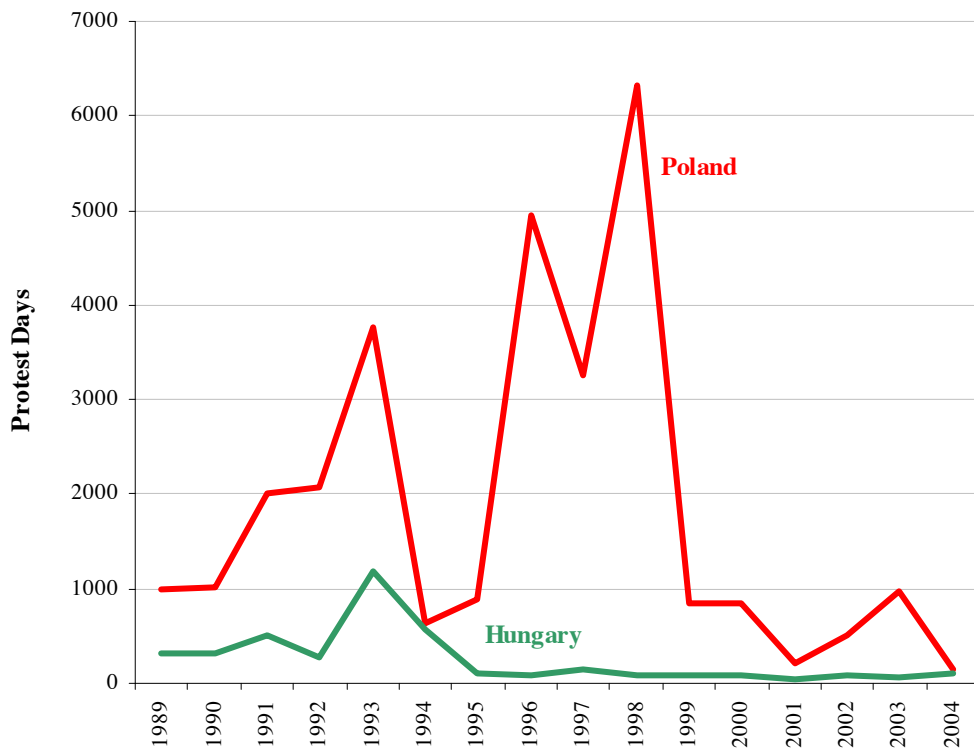
since the 1989-1992 period in all post-communist countries, though this may largely reflect the unusually heightened level of contention induced by the transition process (Figure 5). A de-emphasis on the more confrontational forms of civic activism is most evident in the post-Soviet countries and East Central Europe, and less so in southeastern Europe. Thus, both the least and the most democratic post-communist countries registered the steepest drops in contention<sup>4</sup>.

4 It is also important to note that in non-democratic countries of the former Soviet bloc there are recurring waves of civil society mobilization. So-called “colored revolutions” mark periods of the heightened political crisis usually centered around contested elections. These are cases of rapid mobilization and emergence of civic movements that are followed by de-mobilization, organizational atrophy and passivity of civil society actors (Bunce and Volchik 2006, D’Anieri 2006, Hale 2006, Kuzio 2006). Not surprisingly, in the least democratic post-communist countries there is a much lower level of sustainability of civil society organizations even following the periods of significant public mobilization.

**Figure 4. Protest days in East Central Europe 1989-1994**



**Figure 5. Protest days in Poland and Hungary 1989-2004.\***



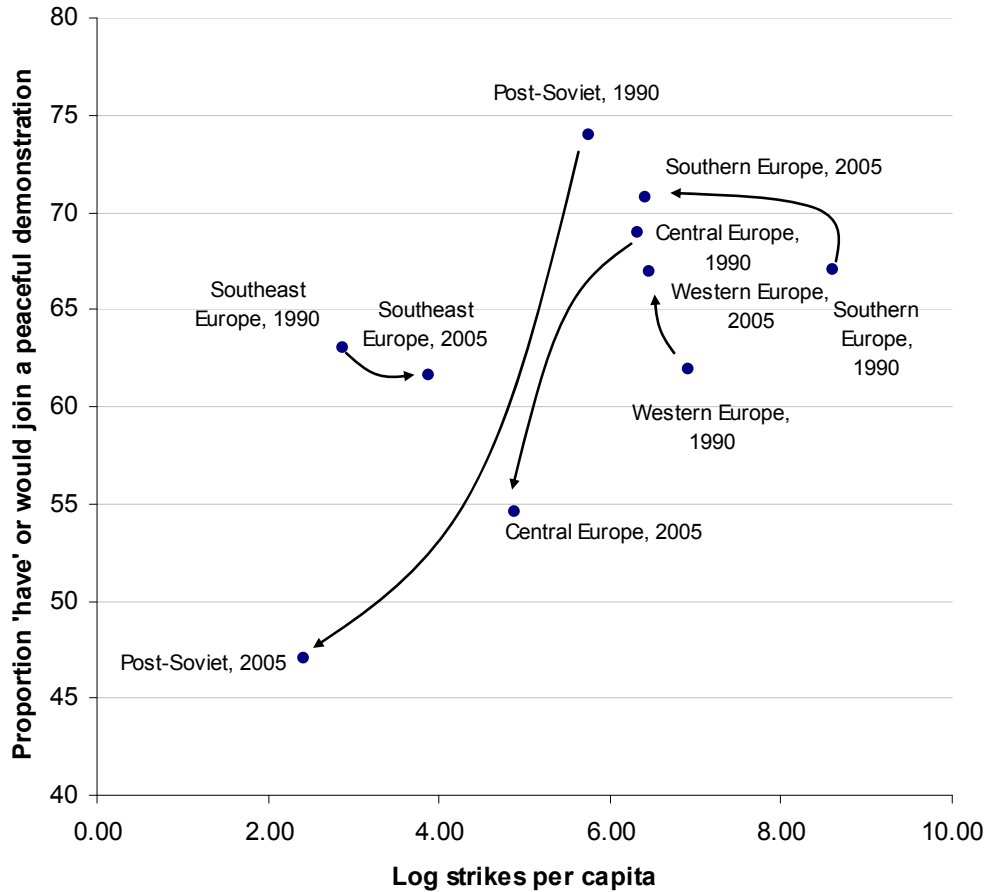
\* Data from the project on The Logic of Civil Society in New Democracies: Hungary, Poland, South Korea and Taiwan coordinated by Grzegorz Ekiert, Jan Kubik and Jason Wittenberg.

Why does this decline in contentious politics occur? While it may be evidence of a civic ‘demobilization’, we would argue that it is more consistent with a view that the transition period saw a spike in contention due to economic austerity, the onset of multiparty politics, and distributional conflicts arising from privatization and welfare reform. A similar spike and decline can be seen in other countries undergoing a transition from authoritarian rule to democracy, such as South Africa, Chile, or Mexico: in South Africa, the proportion of the public claiming to have taken or been prepared to take part in a demonstration fell from 76 to 58 per cent in the 1990s; in Chile, the fall was from 56 to 41 per cent, and in Mexico from 79 to 59 per cent. On this basis, while the fall in the former Soviet bloc countries was indeed very sharp, the levels of civic activism in Central European countries such as Poland (60 to 54 per cent), the Czech Republic (80 to 85 per cent) or Slovakia (79 to 82 per cent) in fact seem comparatively robust.

#### *Normative orientation of civil society actors*

In addition to their behavior, the values of civil society actors matter greatly in determining the political outcomes of their activities. Structural characteristics of civil society such as density or sectoral composition are not crucial for its democracy facilitating functions but the goals and objectives of civil society actors are. In terms of the political orientation of civil society actors, a distinction is sometimes made between liberal and ‘illiberal’ civil societies. Berman (1997) provides a notable example in the case of Weimar Germany where a dense and vibrant civil society ultimately contributed to the fall of democracy and facilitated the rise of the Nazi regime. In addition, values and preferences may determine whether civil society develops along programmatic or clientelistic lines, that is, whether civil society organizations exist to defend citizen rights, work for public good and

**Figure 6. Participation in Demonstrations and Strikes per Capita**



Notes: Source of strikes and lockouts data is the International Labour Organisation. Demonstration participation data is from the World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1990-2005).

Country coding: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia (Central Europe and Baltics); Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia (South East Europe); Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan (Central Asia); Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine (Post-Soviet Europe); Greece, Portugal, Spain (Southern Europe); Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom (Western Europe).

advance the rule of law and democratic process, or simply as a means of extracting material rents for their leaders and members from the state and local administration.

There is no systematic data to assess the normative orientations of civil society organizations similar to, for example, party manifestos analysis. While specific groups of organizations (trade unions, NGOs

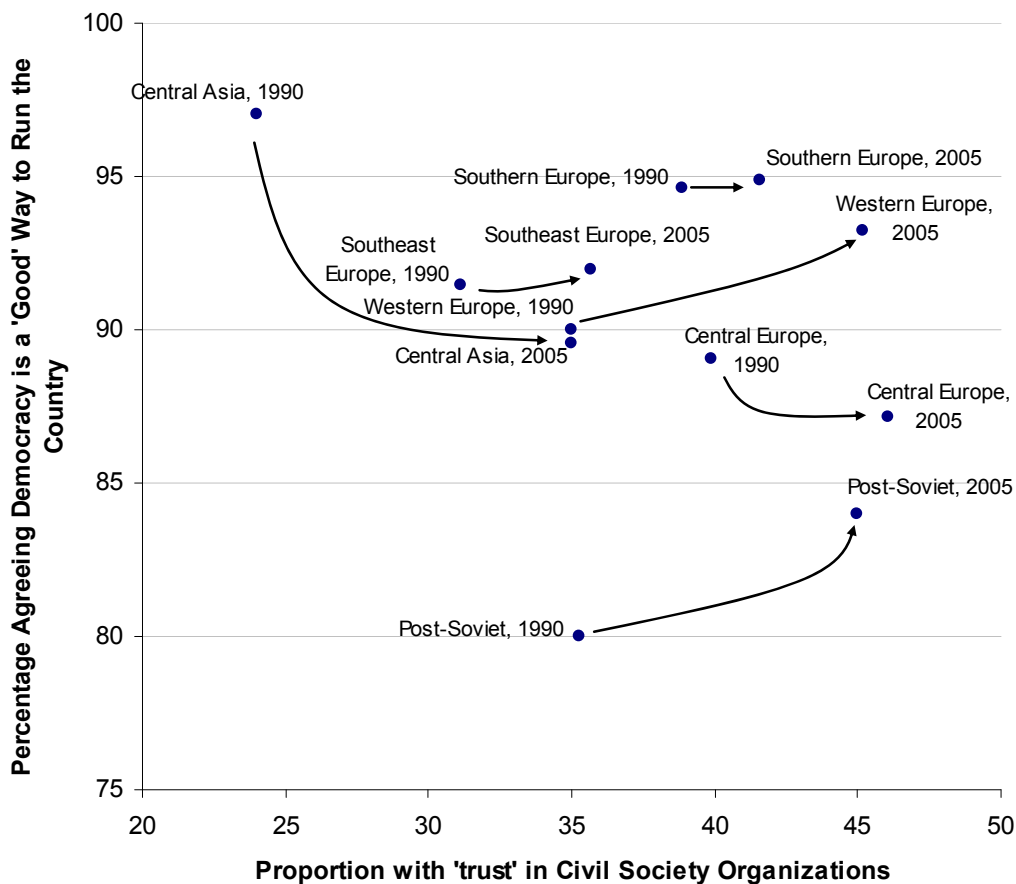
or religious organizations) are commonly associated with distinct ideological positions, surveys may be the only means to assess normative orientations of specific civil societies. One of the most longstanding indicators of the liberal commitment of civil society actors is the degree to which citizens possess a normative commitment to democracy (Almond and Verba 1963). Public opinion surveys often solicit the view whether democracy is a 'good', 'very good', 'bad' or 'very bad' way to run the country, and these



trends, based on the World Value Survey data, are shown for the four clusters of post-communist societies in the Figure below (Figure 7). The normative commitment to democracy is evidently weak among the post-Soviet states, yet it stands almost as high in Southeastern Europe, as is the cases in Southern and Western Europe. Central Europe, meanwhile, fits somewhere in-between the two. In terms of change over time, affective support for democracy has also consolidated in the post-Soviet countries, albeit from a very low starting point.

Post-communist civil societies also fare well with regard to the extent to which they are programmatic rather than clientelist in function. As one indicator which may detect the extent to which civic movements serve to advance the interest of citizens, rather than their own private interests, we can take the degree trust that survey respondents express to have in the civil society organizations of their country. In central Europe and post-Soviet Europe, the public's evaluation of the civic sector is comparable to that found in Southern and Western Europe; only in the Balkans and Central Asia, does this confidence lag behind, possibly reflecting a greater degree of clien-

**Figure 7. Normative Commitment to Democracy**



Notes: Source of attitudinal items is the World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1990-2005).

Country coding: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia (Central Europe and Baltics); Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia (South East Europe); Azerbaijan, Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan (Central Asia); Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine (Post-Soviet Europe); Greece, Portugal, Spain (Southern Europe); Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom (Western Europe).

telism and cooptation. Also charted is the trend over time in trust in civil society organizations since 1990. These trends clearly suggest that the transition from single party rule to pluralism has seen a consolidation of public trust in the civic sector, for public trust in non-government organizations has grown across all post-communist societies since 1990.

Finally, some evidence of the consolidation of a democratic culture can be found in the left-right polarization of respondents. Since Bell (1960) it has been argued that ideological differences narrow as countries develop economically; and empirical evidence suggests this has indeed occurred across Western democracies (Dalton 2005). However, in the new democracies of Central and Eastern Europe, the concern has often been expressed that far from converging on the median, ideological divisions have widened, with the growing popularity of populist and radical right parties (Ramet 1999, Minkenberg 2002, Kopecky and Mudde 2003, Rupnik 2007). Table 6 shows the left-right placement of respondents in a sample of West and East European countries, both in 1990, at the start of transition, and more recently in 2005, using the World Values Survey item for left-right placement on a ten-point scale. Respondents at the extremes ('1' and '10') are classified as extreme left and right, respectively, while those in between are classified as centrist. It can be seen that while levels of ideological polarization in Western Europe have remained low and stable, in this sample of Eastern European countries radicalization has increased. Yet the overall level remains low, both as an overall proportion of the population, and also by broader international comparison.<sup>5</sup> Thus extremism in Central and Eastern European politics may appear worrying from the Western European perspective, but is fundamentally very mild in comparison with other emerging democracies.

5 While 6.6 per cent of Eastern Europeans in this country sample today position themselves as radical right ('10' on a ten-point left to right scale), the equivalent figures are 13 per cent in India, 19 per cent in Indonesia, and 25 per cent in Colombia.

### *The Public Sphere: Rights, Institutions and Political Involvement*

Empirical research on post-communist civil society has paid little attention the public sphere, understood as the discursive space in which individuals and groups can discuss matters of collective interest and, where possible, reach common accord on important public matters (Habermas 1962 [1989] Koller 2010, Clemens 2010). The public sphere is not a part of civil society conceived in organizational terms but rather a necessary and constitutive condition for its existence. Of course, the media as distinct organizations are both a part of civil society and public sphere. Calhoun (1993) characterizes the public sphere as 'an arena for debating possible social arrangements' without which the citizen 'lacks opportunities for participation in collective choice, whether about specific policy issues or basic institutions'. We may expect the quality and consolidation of the public sphere to play a particularly important role in conditions such as those faced by post-communist regimes, where the success of transition depends on the ability of citizens to understand the new 'rules of the game,' including voting rules, the platforms of the major political parties, the process of privatisation, and new citizen rights granted constitutionally.

A sense of the extent of civic debate and exchange is given by the measures detailed in Figure 8, which shows two readily available indicators of the strength of the public sphere: the per capita rate of daily newspaper circulation, and the proportion of the public who consider themselves to be 'very' or 'fairly' interested in politics (World Values Surveys 1981-2007, UNESCO 2008). With regard to newspaper circulation, some parts of the post-communist space, such as Central Europe and the Baltic states, fare substantially better than the Southern European states of Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece, which are in turn comparable with post-Soviet Europe, and substantially better than central Asia. Looking at the

**Table 6: Ideological Polarization among Survey Respondents, 1990-2 and 2005-7**

	Year	Extreme Left	Center	Extreme Right
France	1990	5.1	93.2	1.8
	2005	9.1	88.1	2.8
Italy	1990	8.5	88.8	2.8
	2005	4.9	91.9	3.2
Netherlands	1990	2.5	95.0	2.5
	2005	2.7	95.2	2.1
Sweden	1990	1.2	94.8	4.1
	2005	2.7	94.1	3.2
Great Britain	1990	3.1	93.5	3.4
	2005	3.8	93.8	2.5
West Germany	1990	0.9	97.5	1.7
	2005	3.1	95.6	1.3
<i>Western Europe Average</i>	1990	3.5	93.8	2.7
	2005	4.4	93.1	2.5
Poland	1990	3.6	88.6	7.9
	2005	4.5	85.7	9.9
Romania	1990	1.7	95.6	2.8
	2005	6.0	85.4	8.6
Slovenia	1990	2.5	94.9	2.6
	2005	6.8	86.8	6.4
East Germany	1990	2.2	96.2	1.6
	2005	6.5	92.2	1.4
<i>Eastern Europe Average</i>	1990	2.5	93.8	3.7
	2005	5.9	87.5	6.6

Source: World Values Surveys, waves 2 (1990-2) and 5 (2005-7)

data for self-reported interest in politics, post-communist civil societies even appear to be in the lead, as the sub-region with the highest level of political interest is central Europe and the Baltic states, followed secondly by Western Europe. Notably, in all post-communist regions political interest is greater than in the southern European states of Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal. While political interest appears to have declined since the heady years of the transition, it is notable that levels remain comparable to

those of Western Europe.

Measures of cognitive mobilization do not indicate any deficiency in post-communist Europe. It is possible that higher levels of political interest are a result of the tumultuous experience of economic and political transition, and therefore will prove transitory. Yet data from the earliest wave of the World Values Surveys, conducted before the transition during 1982 in communist Hungary, and in 1984 in a

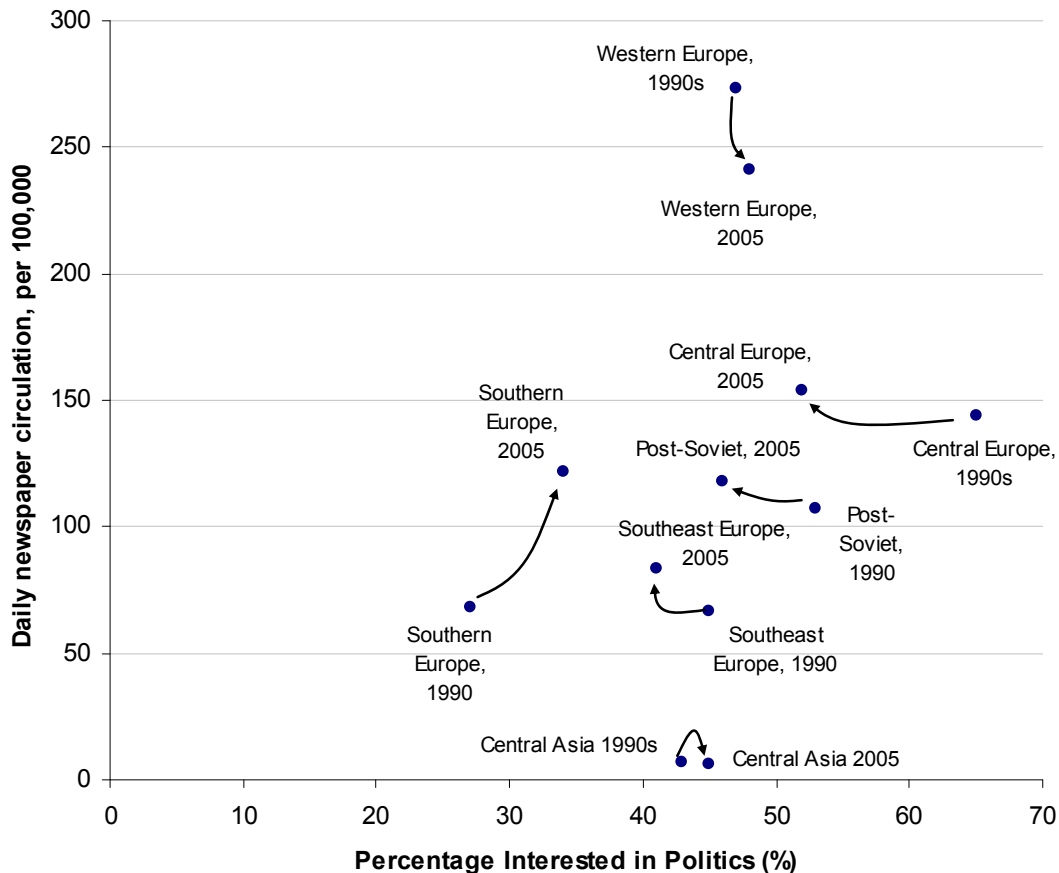
sample site in Soviet Russia, show an equally strong commitment to political debate, suggesting that the high levels of media consumption and political interest are reflective of a deeper tendency in the former communist bloc. At that time, the proportion claiming to be ‘very’ or ‘quite’ interested in politics was also exceptionally high – 66% in Hungary and 61% in the Soviet Union<sup>6</sup>. In addition, for the Hungarian survey the public were also asked how often they spent discussing politics with their friends, to which 67.8% claimed to hold such discussions on a ‘frequent’ or ‘occasional’ basis. This would suggest that,

6 For comparison, the most recent figures are 37% in both France and Italy, and 44% in the UK.

far from exhibiting political disillusionment or withdrawal, ‘cognitive mobilization’ was already feature of the late communist era and has survived into the transition period. Contingent aspects of the communist experience may explain why the initial level was much higher than in the west, including the legacy of mass literacy, but also, the confrontation with an official ideology, either in support or in opposition.

If we compare these figures with the formal institutions – freedom of the press and civil liberties – within which a flourishing public space could emerge, we can see that regimes in Central and Eastern Europe

**Figure 8. Newspaper Circulation and Interest in Politics**



Source: UNESCO, World Values Surveys, waves 2-5 (1989-2006).

Country coding: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia (Central Europe and Baltics); Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia (South East Europe); Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Uzbekistan (Central Asia); Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine (Post-Soviet Europe); Greece, Portugal, Spain (Southern Europe); Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom (Western Europe).

began the transition with much lower levels of initial variation. Figure 9 shows this variation, and the subsequently trajectories of democratic consolidation. The political regimes that replaced communist system has evolved in to the entire spectrum of regime types, ranging from fully consolidated liberal democracies in East Central Europe to “oriental tyrannies” of Central Asia with a range of hybrid regimes in between (Ekiert, Kubik and Vachudova 2007). It should not surprise anyone that such diverse political developments shape the nature of civil society in various post-communist countries and define its autonomy and capacity to pursue its goals. In countries that reverted to authoritarian rule, civil societies are highly constrained and deprived of a legally protected public space. The associational life is dominated by state sponsored and controlled associations and independent civil society actors face many restrictions, constraints, threats and repressions often akin to those they had faced in late communism. Is it the case, as the weakness of civil society argument implies, that improvements in press freedom and associative rights in central and southeastern Europe coincided with citizen withdrawal from associational life, political debate, media discussions, and civic fora?

In the countries of East Central Europe the quality of public space, as measured by the Freedom House index of civil rights and political liberties and the index of Press Freedom, is similar today to one in established Western democracies. Countries of Southeastern Europe have made considerable progress in improving the quality of public space as well, while other sub-regions either did not make any progress (Central Asia) or register significant decline after initial improvement (the remaining part of the Soviet Union except for Baltic republics) during the last decade or so. Thus, in this dimension so important for civil society condition and development the differences between various post-communist countries are enormous.

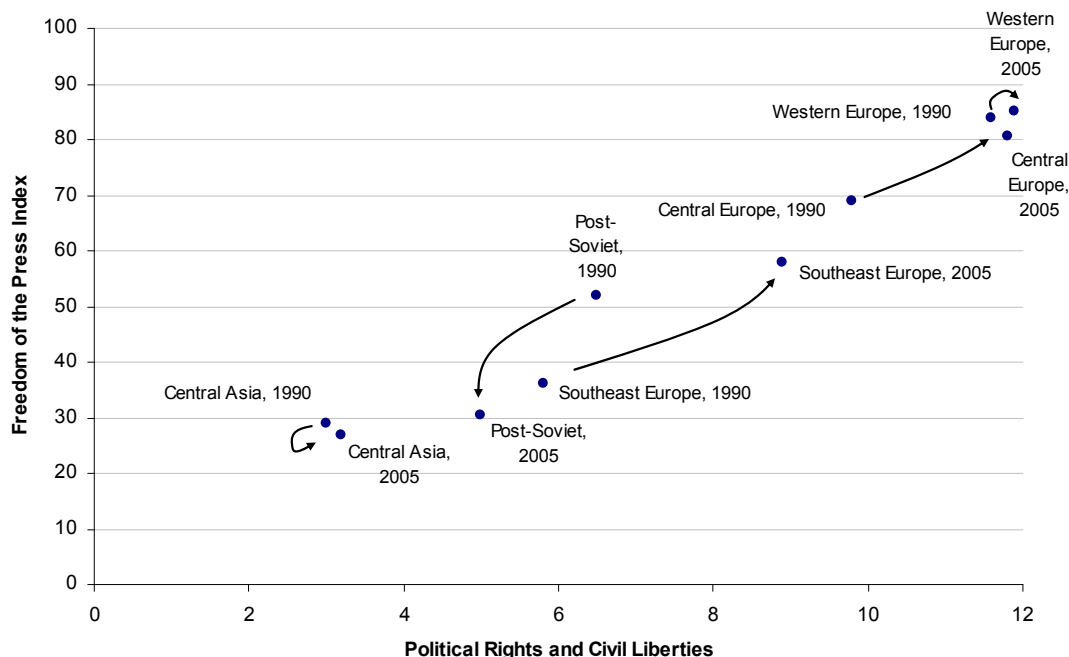
But public sphere is not only a system of enabling legal rights and guaranties. It is also a system of institutions that secure, regulate and translate into reality these fundamental rights. Measuring the institutional dimension of public sphere is more difficult but the USAID index of NGO sustainability can serve as a good proxy.

The index measures NGO sustainability along seven dimensions: legal environment, organizational capacity, financial viability, advocacy, service provision and public image. The comparison of all post-communist societies mirrors the picture generated by comparing the rights and freedoms. There are striking differences among parts of the former Soviet bloc with East Central Europe showing considerable and consistent gains and with Central Asia and other countries of the former Soviet Union (except for Baltic republics) showing considerably less friendly environment for civil society organizations.

### **Estimating the Impact of Civil Society on Democratic Consolidation**

Does it matter that previous studies of civil society have tended to focus largely on narrow measures of declared membership in voluntary association, to the expense of other dimensions of civil society structure and activity? We believe that it does. The civil society literature suggests a range of mechanisms linking aspects of social and civic life to democratic transition and consolidation, and a narrow focus on membership, risks missing the dimensions of civil society most relevant to the flourishing of democratic governance. Pluralist theories of democracy, for example, following in the tradition of Robert Dahl (1961), stress the representative role of civil society groups and organizations in setting the agenda of democratic politics, thereby ensuring outcomes that reflect a suf-

**Figure 9. Constitutive Freedoms of the Public Sphere**

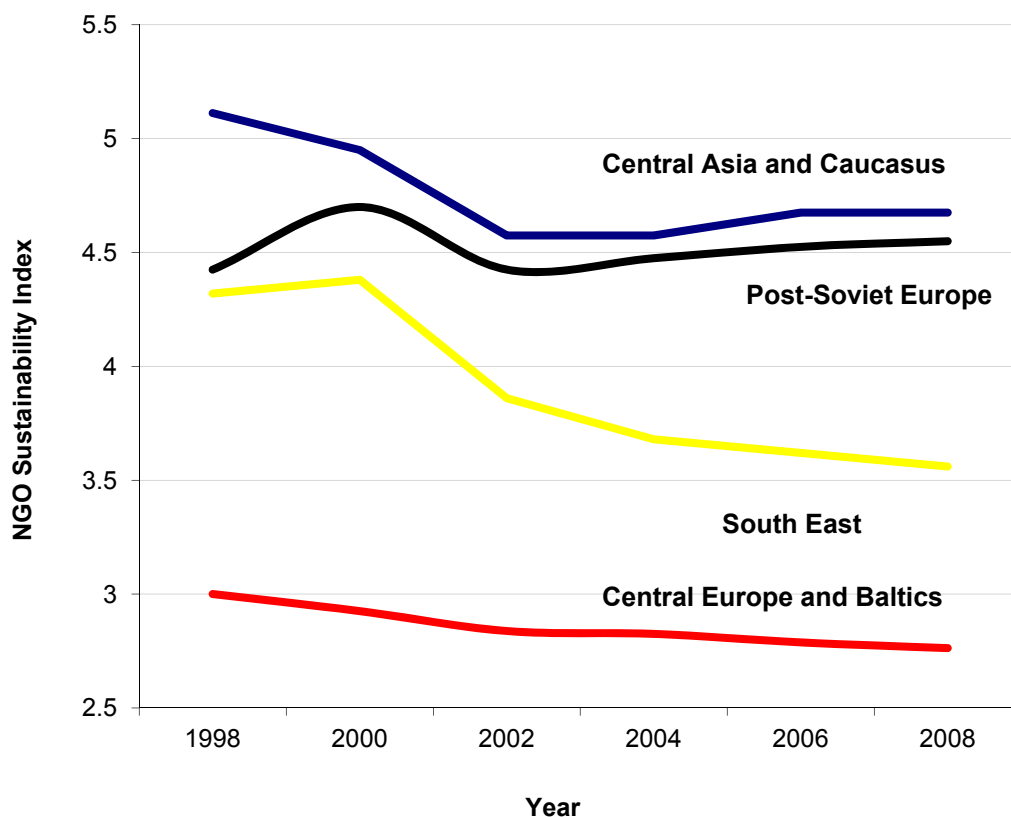


Country coding: Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovak Republic, Slovenia (Central Europe and Baltics); Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia (South East Europe); Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan (Central Asia); Armenia, Belarus, Georgia, Moldova, Russia, Ukraine (Post-Soviet Europe); Greece, Portugal, Spain (Southern Europe); Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Sweden, United Kingdom (Western Europe).

ficiently wide spectrum of public opinion. This view suggests the density of civic organizations, and in particular membership of organizations such as labor unions, business groups, or groups that represent salient social issues, competition among organizations and normative pluralism as an indicators of the health of democratic life. On the other hand, a tradition in political culture dating back to Alexis de Tocqueville, though more recently expounded by Robert Putnam (2000, 2002, 2003), sees civic organizations as mechanisms of democratic socialization - ‘schools of democracy’—where citizens are socialized into the norms of democratic life such as debate, negotiation, and compromise. From such a perspective, it makes sense to adopt more inclusive definition of civil society and to track membership in more apolitical local voluntary groups, and participation in communal activities. Another, third tradition in behavioral political science sees the role of civil society organi-

zations as a means of holding politicians to account through acts of direct contestation, for example, organizing mass demonstrations when politicians renege on campaign promises, are exposed in corruption scandals, or violate constitutional norms. If this is how civil society affects political outcomes, then we ought to measure the propensity of citizens to engage in ‘contentious’ activities, such as strike, petitions and boycotts, rather than more passive membership in association, which may not have the same effect upon institutional accountability. Finally, there is the view associated with Jürgen Habermas, that a constitutive part of vibrant civil society is a ‘public sphere’, a forum in which diverse public opinions can engage one another, and an overlapping consensus emerge regarding the best policy options. Such a mechanism leads us to focus on legal guaranties ensuring equal access to the public domain as well as on civic participation in the media, both as readers

**Figure 10. NGO Sustainability Index (lower number represents better score)**



and as contributors to the public debate, for example by writing letters to newspapers, running internet blogs, or attending local town meetings, as well as the legal guaranties that allow public communication to flourish.

Having noticed the variation in the organization and strength of civil society across post-communist countries on a range of dimensions, in this section of the paper, therefore, we test to see how much of the variation in democratic outcomes can be explained by variation. We do so via a series of cross-national time-series regressions, using as our dependent variable the level of democracy, and as our independent variables, a battery of civil society indicators, socio-economic controls, and the dependent variable for democracy lagged to  $t_{-0}$ .

The dependent variable used is the combined score

of the Freedom House indices for political rights and civil liberties, which are then inverted to produce a 12-point scale from 2 (full dictatorship) to 14 (full democracy). Panels are arranged on a 5-year basis, with independent variables set to a lag of 10 years to reflect the realistic duration required for social changes to exhibit an effect upon political institutions. The lagged dependent variable, the country's Freedom House score from 10 years prior, is included as the extent of earlier liberalization will naturally determine the trajectory of future reform, and we wish to control for potential endogeneity between earlier democratization and the existing build-up of civil society. Second, we include a control for log GDP per capita, lagged by ten years. The earliest studies have shown a significant positive effect of economic development upon the emergence of democracy, as well as the likelihood of adverse shifts away from democratic government (Przeworski and Limongi 2000). A control is also included for ethno-linguistic and religious fractionalization, which has been widely argued to affect the likelihood of suc-

successful democratic transition (Chua 2003, Snyder 2001), taken from the Alesina et al. (2003) dataset. Finally, we include each of four measures of civil society development, lagged by 10 years – an index of protest behavior taken from the World Values Survey, membership of voluntary organizations, again, taken from the World Values Survey, daily newspaper circulation per 1,000, as reported by UNESCO, and connections to international NGOs, from the LSE Civil Society Yearbook (World Values Surveys 2008, London School of Economics 2003).

Regressions are conducted across three sub-samples of the data: first, across countries experiencing democratic transition; second, across all countries; and third, across ex-Communist regimes only. We present these sequentially. First, Table 7 shows results from the initial three sets of models, in which we restrict the sample to all polities in which there was a movement from ‘not free’ to either ‘party free’ or ‘free’ on the Freedom House indices during the period from 1980 to 2005. Our guiding hypothesis is that liberalization of autocratic regimes often begins with the initiative of reformist elites, but after this point, there is an opening in which civil society can help facilitate a transition to fully democratic rule: where civil society is sufficiently robust, such a transition ought to be more likely; where, by contrast, civil society groups are co-opted, clientelistic, or simply absent, popular pressure upon reforming elites to deliver further liberalization is weaker (Przeworski 1991).

Membership of voluntary associations, the most popular measure of civil society strength, is not a significant predictor of democratic transition. Indeed the size of the coefficient does not exceed the standard error, and is significantly negative when included with other civil society variables (Models 5 and 6). On the other hand, all of our supplementary measures of civic strength are significant predictors of the degree of a country’s democratic transition.

Consistent with the recent focus of behavioral political science upon protest activity (Norris 2002, Dalton 2005), civic participation in protest does predict successful democratic consolidation, both uniquely (Model 4) and in combination with other civil society indicators (Model 6). Meanwhile, consistent with the findings of Paxton (2002), the density of international civic activism also predicts future democratic consolidation, both alone (Model 3) or jointly (Models 5 and 6). Following the results of the regressions, a one-standard deviation increase in protest behavior at  $t_{-1}$  is associated with a 0.775-point increase on the 12-point freedom house scale, while a one standard deviation increase in initial INGO participation is associated with as much as a 3.464-point increase in subsequent democratic consolidation. Newspaper circulation at  $t_{-1}$  is also a significant predictor of subsequent successful transition (Model 2); though is not robust to the inclusion of the measure for INGO density, most likely due to collinearity between these items.

It is possible that in choosing to select only countries undergoing regime transition, the regressions in Table 7 introduce sample bias; in particular if there are either authoritarian regimes or failing democracies that possess strong civil institutions. Table 8 therefore shows results from the second of these three sets of models, conducted across the entire sample of countries for which there is available data - including both consolidated democracies and authoritarian regimes which have not experienced transition.

Once again, participation in protest activities, such as petition, boycott and demonstration, continues to predict successful democratic consolidation, both uniquely (Model 9) and in combination with other civil society indicators (Model 11). The coefficient for INGO density has become more weakly significant (Model 10): and we suspect this may reflect the inclusion of countries such as Rwanda or Sudan, namely in which there are higher levels of INGO



**Table 7: Cross-National Times Series Regressions (1) on Democracy: All Countries Experiencing Regime Transitions, 1989-2005**

Dependent variable: Combined Freedom House Scores for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1-14 (14=full democracy)

Sample: All democratizing states

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Combined Freedom House Score, lagged (10-yr)	0.335 (0.083)***	0.313 (0.079)***	0.311 (0.079)***	0.363 (0.078)***	0.237 (0.1)*	0.201 (0.106)
Voluntary associational memberships, lagged (10-yr)	0.903 (1.094)	-	-	-	-1.59 (0.891)	-2.646 (0.849)**
Newspaper circulation, lagged (10-yr)	-	2.312 (0.817)**	-	-	0.787 (0.836)	1.163 (0.881)
Participation in boycotts, petitions and demonstrations, lagged (10-yr)	-	-	0.775 (0.365)*	-	1.025 (0.638)	2.008 (0.549)**
INGO density, lagged	-	-	-	2.222 (0.961)*	3.464 (1.508)*	4.95 (1.494)**
Ethnic-religious fractionalization	0.477 (0.558)	0.684 (0.487)	0.815 (0.519)	0.205 (0.416)	1.581 (0.75)*	0.95 (0.76)
Log GDP per capita, lagged (10-yr)	2.311 (0.406)***	1.013 (0.397)*	2.114 (0.397)***	0.932 (0.28)**	1.817 (0.701)*	-
Constant	-12.822 (3.986)**	-1.035 (3.748)	-10.805 (3.684)**	-2.378 (2.571)	-10.338 (6.363)	5.702 (1.596)**
n	73	108	82	164	46	46
r <sup>2</sup>	0.47	0.37	0.49	0.28	0.62	0.55

5-year panels.

Included in the panel are all countries for which there was a movement from 'not free' to either 'partly free' or 'free' during the period from 1980 to 2005, following Freedom House classifications.

\* significant at the 0.05 level; \*\* significant at the 0.01 level; \*\*\* significant at the 0.001 level; † significant at the 0.1 level

presence due to donor-dependency, but fragile prospects for democratic consolidation. Again, the coefficient for voluntary associational activity is either non-significant (Model 7) or negative (Model 11).

Finally, it might be argued that the attributes requisite for democratic transition are condition upon the attributes of the former regime, and specifically, whether we are treating a transition from communist rule or from some other form of authoritarianism. Because

transition from communism is a dual transition that requires the development not only of a democratic polity, but also of a viable market economy, certain kinds of civic organization – such as NGOs involved in providing micro-finance to small businesses or expertise in business administration – may have a particular role to play in ensuring the viability of the consolidation process. Table 9 reports results conducted just across the sample of former Communist regimes, following the same model specifications as those of earlier regressions.

**Table 8: Cross-National Times Series Regressions (2) on Democracy: All Countries, 1989-2005**

Dependent variable: Combined Freedom House Scores for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1-14 (14=full democracy)

	Sample: All countries				
	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)
Combined Freedom House Score, lagged (10-yr)	0.311 (0.06)***	0.408 (0.055)***	0.23 (0.055)***	0.519 (0.047)***	0.271 (0.073)***
Voluntary associational memberships, lagged (10-yr)	0.181 (0.77)	-	-	-	-0.893 (0.346)**
Newspaper circulation, lagged (10-yr)	-	0.017 (0.274)	-	-	-0.375 (0.227)
Participation in boycotts, petitions and demonstrations, lagged (10-yr)	-	-	0.766 (0.255)**	-	1.222 (0.363)**
INGO density, lagged	-	-	-	1.115 (0.667)†	0.951 (0.909)
Ethnic-religious fractionalization	0.093 (0.371)	1.186 (0.255)***	0.197 (0.331)	0.07 (0.274)	0.501 (0.395)
Log GDP per capita, lagged (10-yr)	1.528 (0.239)***	0.237 (0.326)	1.473 (0.244)***	0.725 (0.187)***	1.234 (0.333)***
Constant	-5.663 (2.116)**	-3.705 (2.266)	-4.53 (2.171)*	-1.508 (1.577)	-3.575 (2.885)
n	147	294	130	191	101
r <sup>2</sup>	0.63	0.56	0.58	0.57	0.68

5-year panels.

\* significant at the 0.05 level; \*\* significant at the 0.01 level; \*\*\* significant at the 0.001 level; † significant at the 0.1 level

Across the sub-sample of former Communist states, we find again that lagged INGO density and participation in boycotts, petitions and demonstrations are significantly positively associated with future level of democracy, whereas membership of local voluntary associations has a negative association (Models 12-14). The size of the coefficient estimates is broadly comparable to earlier models; restricting to the sub-sample of former Communist regimes, however, reduces their significance by inflating standard errors.

However, while membership of local NGOs here is negatively associated with democratization, other measures of organizational capacity show a different result. The USAID produces an annual audit of civil society strength for countries across Europe and Eurasia, in the form of the CSO Sustainability Index, and among the components of the index is a measure for Organizational Capacity (USAID 2012). Using this measure of the organizational strength of the civic sector, we arrive at very different results. In Figure 11, we show the partial correlation of Freedom House scores in 2005 with the Organizational Capacity rating produced by USAID for the coun-

**Table 9: Cross-National Times Series Regressions (2) on Democracy: Ex-Communist Regimes Only, 1989-2005**

Dependent variable: Combined Freedom House Scores for Political Rights and Civil Liberties, 1-14 (14=full democracy)

Sample: Ex-communist regimes only

	(12)	(13)	(14)
Combined Freedom House Score, lagged (10-yr)	0.223 (0.111)	0.226 (0.107)*	0.208 (0.104)
Voluntary associational memberships, lagged (10-yr)	-1.516 (0.633)*	-1.301 (0.589)*	-1.378 (0.576)*
Newspaper circulation, lagged (10-yr)	-0.706 (0.683)	-0.72 (0.661)	-0.529 (0.606)
Participation in boycotts, petitions and demonstrations, lagged (10-yr)	2.013 (0.803)*	1.722 (0.742)*	2.094 (0.548)**
INGO density, lagged	3.46 (1.665)*	3.159 (1.564)*	3.756 (1.339)**
Ethnic-religious fractionalization	0.705 (0.721)	-	-
Log GDP per capita, lagged (10-yr)	0.624 (0.936)	0.683 (0.909)	-
Constant	1.539 (8.255)	2.068 (8.018)	8.047 (0.895)***
<hr/>			
N	38	40	40
r <sup>2</sup>	0.63	0.61	0.60

5-year panels.

Included in the panel are all former Communist countries for which data are available.

\* significant at the 0.05 level; \*\* significant at the 0.01 level; \*\*\* significant at the 0.001 level; † significant at the 0.1 level

tries of post-communist Europe in the 1990s, controlling for the Freedom House score of 1995. It can be seen from the positive correlation between these items that, all else equal, countries with greater CSO organizational capacity in the 1990s were those most likely to maintain democratic gains in the subsequent decade (the major outlier is Russia: see Figure 11).

These correlations imply that the focus of the weakness of civil society literature upon levels of mem-

bership in voluntary association is not only limited in its understanding of civil society, but also misguided in its implications for democratic consolidation across the region. The persistently negative sign for voluntary membership may be puzzling, though as studies by Berman (1997) and others have pointed out, it is not ‘social capital’ per se that is beneficial for democracy, but rather, the kinds of civic behavior which reinforce the support for and functioning of democratic institutions - such as the protest which ensures political accountability, or the connections to international civil society which ensure the trans-

mission of liberal norms, the monitoring of human rights, and the financial resources that allow civic organizations to provide an effective check upon the behavior of elected politicians and salaried public officials. In these regards, as we have seen, there is variation across the post-communist space such that in a number of regions, in particular Central Europe, southeastern Europe, and the Baltic states, civil society actors do have the resources and structures necessary for making democracy work.

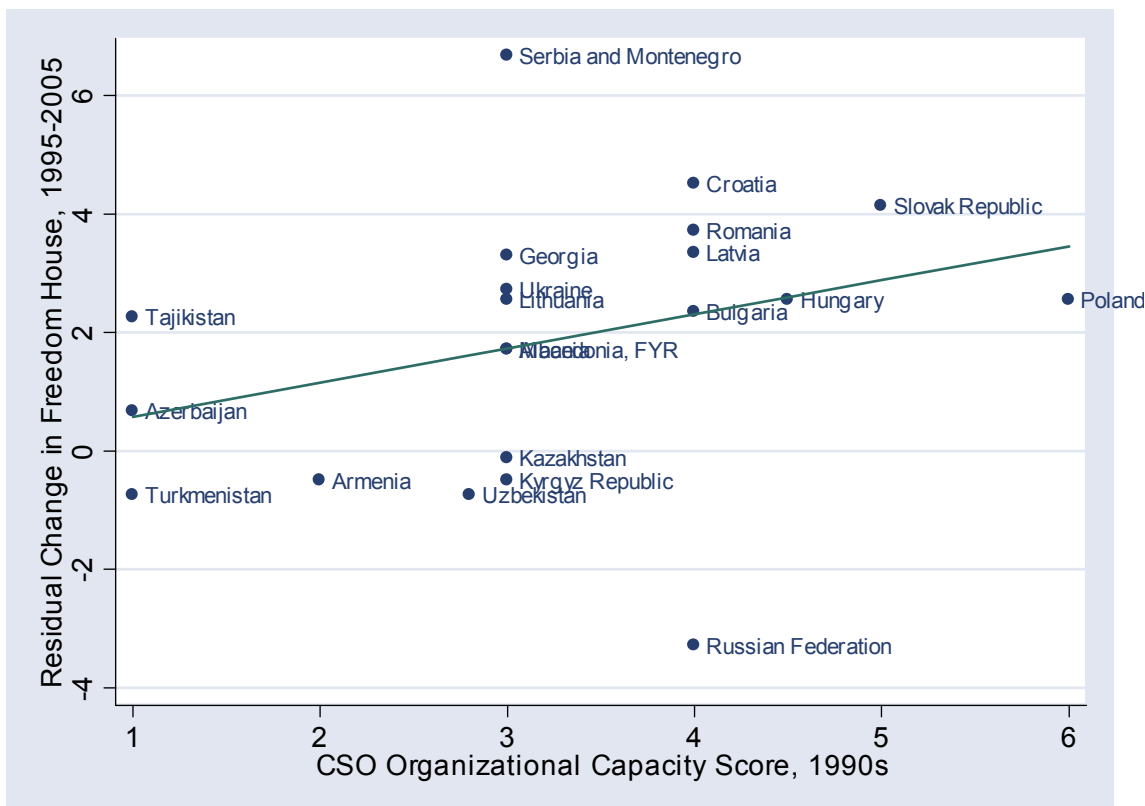
Such variation is displayed in Figure 12, which shows the joint effect of civil society institutions and behavior – voluntary association, newspaper circulation, participation in protest, and the extent of connections to international NGOs – upon future levels of democracy for countries across the region, estimated using the coefficients from Model 11.

The one-decade civic effect varies from 1.7 in Croatia, to negative -0.75 in the case of Moldova. The effects of civic legacies on democratic consolidation are therefore substantial and positive in the case of the Central European and Baltic countries, but somewhat deleterious in the cases of Belarus, and the Caucasian Republics.

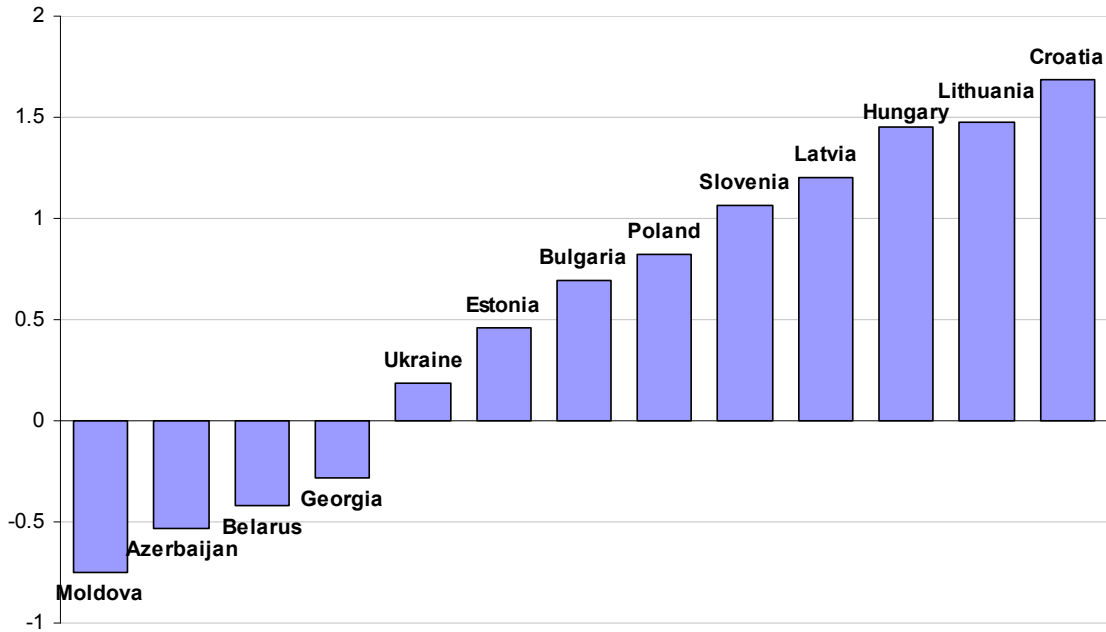
### Conclusions: Civil Societies in Post-Communist Europe

Though the collapse of communism may seem a relatively recent event, it is already the same distance behind us as was the collapse of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy when Almond and Verba published *The Civic Culture* in 1963. Today, as then, we are faced with the same paradox: the relative durability

**Figure 11. Partial Correlation of USAID CSO Organizational Capacity Rating, 1990s with Combined Freedom House Scores in 2005 (Controlling for Freedom House Scores in 1995)**



**Figure 12. Estimated Effect of Civic Institutions on Combined Freedom House Scores (Coefficients from Model 11)**



Joint estimated effect of voluntary association, newspaper circulation, participation in protest, and the extent of connections to international NGOs upon level of democracy ten years hence, controlling for income per capita and ethnic-religious fractionalization.

of democratic consolidation in the face of apparently weak participation in civil society organizations registered by the surveys. Just as Almond and Verba distinguished different dimensions of civic orientation, we suggest that scholars should take into account different dimensions of civil society. Post-communist civil societies are not as feeble as is often assumed. Many possess vigorous public spheres and an active associational life, with civil society actors influencing policy outcomes on local and national levels. Moreover, after examining the different dimensions of civil society organization and behavior we find no evidence of deterioration over time, as the decline of older organizational forms is balanced by the arrival of new organizations and expanding ties to international civil society.

By pursuing a multidimensional strategy for analyzing the constitution of civil society and civic behavior – that is, by measuring organization and behavior

of civil society actors along a range of different dimensions and using a range of different sources rather than by a single concept or instrument, such as the number of voluntary associations – we have been able to present a picture of post-communist civil society that is more complex and more interesting. It is evident as to the extent to which prior studies of civil society have tended to be narrowly focused on just one dimension of civic life - typically membership in voluntary organization - and on a limited set of data sources, typically, public opinion surveys. Furthermore, we are forced to abandon any simplistic generalizations regarding the ‘weakness of postcommunist’ civil society or its ‘demobilization’ following democratic transition, as many individual indicators tell a contrary story.

As a result, we can begin to resolve some of the paradoxes highlighted at the start of this paper. The seemingly strong, active and mobilized civic movements

of the transition period did not become weak after democracy was established, but rather, have subsided into more routinized forms of organization, representation, contention and political debate. The associational structures of the communist era have indeed somewhat weakened, but they are still there, and are being steadily supplemented with new domestic and international organization, networks and ties. And the diverging political trajectories across the post-communist space do indeed reflect different civic endowments at the start of the transition era - but these civic legacies should be understood multidimensionally, in terms of the public space, normative orientations, modes of behavior, and organizational structure that different parts of the post-communist space have inherited from their past and modes of transition. Interestingly, the pattern of institutional performance and civil society organization and behavior in the Europe of the first decade of the twenty-first century, bears some resemblance to that in the Europe of the first decade of the twentieth (Ekiert and Ziblatt, forthcoming). And as the experience of communism is succeeded by new processes of European integration and development of transnational civil society, this legacy will be increasingly submerged under new patterns of civic and associational life, different again from both the recent and distant historical record; while the term 'post-communist' will become steadily redundant as a means of describing political reality.

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