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Contestation or Complicity: Civil Society as Antidote or Accessory to Political Corruption

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Abstract

Corruption interferes with and distorts the political and implementation processes, often to the disadvantage of the already disadvantaged. Yet our understanding of the factors that might propel a political system from lower to higher levels of probity (or vice versa) remains speculative at best. This article examines the role of one category of actors often touted as an important agent of change: civil society organizations. Considerable theoretical and empirical work exists on the expected and observed benefits of civil society for democracy more generally. Few studies have systematically examined the relationship between the richness of associational life and the quality of governance in a country. Moreover, several parallel theoretical accounts exist regarding the mechanism through which civil society might enhance government performance but few studies examine the relative explanatory merit of these theoretical accounts. This study addresses both of these gaps. The results show that civil society does have some bearing on the extent to which corruption exists in a country, and that the primary mechanism seems to be that civil society engages in contestation and representation of public interests. Two other theoretical accounts – that associations build social capital and therefore reduce corruption, and that welfare services provided by civil society organizations are less susceptible to corruption – receive less robust support in these data.

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Introduction

Political science research has in recent years shown a growing appreciation for the informal institutions of politics, the norms and networks that guide the behavior of both political principals, agents and clients in the political system, and the primary role these institutions play in determining the outcomes of the political process. Research on Latin American politics in particular has increasingly begun to direct attention at these informal practices, at how the political process works in actuality, a focus which represents a departure from a previous focus primarily on the formal institutional arrangements such as parties, elections, presidentialism and policy formation (Munck 2004, O'Donnell 2001). While informal institutions may in some instances be networks of mutual assistance, they are often times interactions that create and perpetuate dependency and exclusion, infusing the public sphere with unpredictability and arbitrariness.

This article explores these more detrimental informal institutions, loosely grouped under the label political corruption, and seeks to contribute to our understanding of what factors may explain why some societies have been able to contain corruption better than others. Corruption undermines regulation, acts as a regressive tax on the poor, distorts bidding processes leading to suboptimal subcontracting and at times infrastructure that is faulty or simply not built, and represents a breakdown of the principles of rule of law, a lynchpin of political equality. Recognition of these consequences has led researchers to examine the institutions and channels that may enable society to hold politicians and public officials accountable (e.g. Mainwaring & Welna 2003; Peruzzotti & Smulovitz 2006). The analysis presented here considers whether civil society organizations offer promise in this regard.

Civil society is often pointed to as a key player in a meta-system of checks and balances in a polity. The OECD, one of several international organizations that has in the last decade begun to direct increasing attention to the issue of corruption, maintains that "Civil society plays a key role in fighting corruption. Today, this statement is unchallenged: it has become a leitmotiv of anti-corruption discourses" (OECD 2003). Other weighty actors on the international arena share this conviction and see a strong civil society as a key to combating corruption. In a short summary of its development philosophy, the United Nations Development Programme takes the following position: "Public sector management is increasingly seen as more than just modernising state institutions, it is also about fostering dynamic partnerships with civil society and the private sector in order to improve the quality of service delivery, enhance social responsibilities and ensure the broad participation of citizens in decision-making."¹ To offer more concrete example of this stance, projects to strengthen civil society constitute the single largest segment of USAID aid directed at reducing corruption (on the order of \$33 million USD in 2002).²

These optimistic endorsements of civil society organizations echo normative theories that see civil society as a key to a well functioning democracy. These theories envision civil society as constituting the organizational circuitry via which representation and accountability operate in representative democracy. Following to a great extent the work

¹ <http://www.undp.org/governance/sl-par.htm>

² http://www.usaid.gov/our_work/democracy_and_governance/technical_areas/anti-corruption/types.html

of Jürgen Habermas (1996), several authors emphasize the democratic deficit in models of government that only assign citizens a voice within the bounds of electoral institutions. Civil society is construed as giving shape to the communicative space of the public sphere, within which policy ideas take form or can be deliberated, modified, and tested for public responses and reactions (Arato 2006).

Quite contrary to civil society optimists, the considerable volume of research on civil society and its role in processes of democratic development gives cause for more tempered expectations of civil society as a democratic force. A number of historical analyses of powerfully instructive cases have recently emerged that not only cast doubt on the capacity of civil society to promote democratic change but document in great detail the contributions of civil society organizations to highly anti-democratic movements. Civil society organizations in Weimar Germany strongly contributed the rise of a highly oppressive regime; numerous local and federated organizations in the United States joined forces to oppose desegregation efforts in the mid-twentieth century; and a number of movements in Argentina have unambiguously anti-systemic aims and little concern for democratic principles or rule of law (Armony 2004).

Moreover, even if the historical record showed that civil society organizations did predominantly seek to bring about more democratic societies, it is important to keep in mind that they by their very nature of being non-governmental organizations and therefore outside the political system, lack formal coercive and sanctioning power and rely instead on tactics such as framing and shaming to bring about change (Gordon & Berkovitch; Keck & Sikkink 1998; Risse 2001; Snow & Benford 1992). For this reason, some authors argue that civil society actors *cannot* hold public officials accountable to public law, and therefore have a limited capacity to affect the quality of government practices (Mainwaring 2003, 7).

Though the bodies research on civil society and corruption are each considerable in their own right, few studies examine the relationship between the two, and even fewer stretch beyond the scope of a single case. This article uses country level data to investigate whether there is any support for the contention that the richness of civil society in a polity has bearing on the extent to which government practices adhere to the law of that particular land, as measured by the perceived prevalence of corruption in the country. The results indicate that a dense civil society may in fact reduce corruption, though only in countries in which political institutions are democratic. The analyses then consider whether the observed relationship can be attributed to two other theoretical accounts of link between civil society and democracy in a country: that civil society organizations reduce corruption because they provide welfare services, or because they serve to generate social capital. In comparing the relative importance of these three explanations, I seek to assess the different theorized mechanisms via which civil society is presumed to contribute to increasing the quality of government. Can the roles of civil society identified in previous research be at work contemporaneously or have these research traditions simply been observing the same phenomenon through different theoretical lenses?

The first section of the paper reviews the theorized mechanisms by which civil society might affect government performance. Section two details the data and measures used. The third part of the paper presents the analyses, and the concluding section draws out the

theoretical and policy implications of this study and identifies important questions for future research.

Contestation and representation: Vertical accountability and civil society as generator and disseminator of norms

A considerable body of comparative research explores the correlates of corruption, in particular factors such as economic well-being (e.g. Lee 2007; Montinola & Jackman 2002), integration in the global economy and community (Ades & de Tella 1999; Sandholz & Gray 2003), the design of the electoral system (refs), the extent of political competition (Montinola & Jackman 2002); the structure of the political system whether parliamentary or presidential, centralized or federal (Charron 2007), the size of state spending and extent of regulation of the business environment (Hopkin & Rodríguez-Pose 2007), and the degree of freedom and pluralism in the media (Lindstedt and Naurin 2006). With the exception of Lee's (2007) study of the effects of the density and centrality of labor unions on government performance, comparative research on good governance has largely ignored the role of civil society. In contrast, case study research has explored civil society efforts to hold government officials accountable and increase legality in government practice, identifying strategies and conditions under which civil society groups succeed in pressuring for prosecution of misdeeds or institutional reform (Armony 2004; Eaton 2003; Taylor 2006; Véron et al 2006; several chapters in Peruzzotti & Smulovitz 2006). Furthermore, a wealth of studies on social capital and social movements examine the role of civil society in related issues such as protecting human rights and enhancing the vibrancy of the democratic process more generally.

Taking stock of some of the extensive and elucidating studies of civil society, Edwards, Foley & Diani (2001) delineate three broad functions that civil society may perform in contributing to raising standards of living and the standard of democracy in a country, a delineation that provides a useful framework for the comparative analysis presented below. Briefly, civil society may engage in *contestation and representation*, articulating the preferences and needs of a group or a group's view of the public interest; organizations may also perform a 'public or quasi-public function' in *providing welfare related services*; and finally, civil society may play a central role in *socializing* individuals into norms of reciprocity, tolerance, and the give and take of procedural democracy (Edwards, Foley & Diani 2001, 5). While considerable research exists on each of these functions, we know little of their relative importance in enhancing democracy. Does civil society primarily enhance democracy by contestation and representation, by providing citizens with the social resources needed to act the role of citizens, or by socializing a broader populous in norms of tolerance and collaboration?

Beginning with the thesis that civil society acts as an arena for representation and contestation, Jürgen Habermas (1996), and several have followed his lead, has argued that civil society constitutes the "...organizational substratum of groups, associations, and movements required of the generalization of the experience of communication, as well as for its political influence" (Arato 2006, 310). Civil society provides the organizational structure within which ideas relating to collective concerns, needs, and values take shape and may (or may not) be perceived by those in positions of political power. The influence of civil society in this regard is quite diffuse and occurs when organizations succeed in

framing issues to influence public understandings and actions (Gordon & Berkovitch; Keck & Sikkink 1998; Snow & Benford 1992). New issues assume salience, or new perspectives may come to light in the broad communicative process that transpires within and among organizations. To the extent that public understandings do change and embrace a new norm or focus on a new issue, civil society organizations may modify the political logic of prioritizing one policy over another, or institutional reform versus not.

Several conditions might enable, or alternatively limit the capacity of, civil society to perform this deliberating function. First, organizations that are publicly oriented are presumed to be more important in this process—organizations that seek to communicate to and persuade a broader public and “have the capacity to project their voice” (Warren 2001, 164). Organizations whose primary aim is to solve a collective problem that only involves a delimited group or provide enjoyment for members are presumably less relevant (Fung 2003). Skocpol and Fiorina (1999) argue that organizations that cut across class lines are also crucial in this broad discursive process, as a broad membership has the opportunity to articulate their interests to elite members, who can then represent these interests, in the name of the organization, in the political decision-making arena.

Perhaps more importantly, attributes of the political environment determine whether civil society groups might participate in increasing accountability and enriching communication between citizens and political power. If those in power are not concerned with reelection, they lack incentives to respond to and heed public pressure (Arato 2006). In contexts in which political competition is weak or absent, as in one party systems or systems in which electoral fraud is prevalent, we might therefore expect civil society to have rather limited opportunities to affect any aspect of the use and practice of public power. Even in such authoritarian settings, however, authorities on both the input and output sides of politics benefit from retaining a certain level of legitimacy in the eyes of a citizenry and may therefore be concerned about the publication of information that might have reputational effects.

One important exception to the dearth of comparative studies on the relationship between civil society and government corruption explores some of these issues. Lee (2007) provides considerable evidence that class transecting organizations indeed serve to channel ideas that are amenable to the broader public interest into the decision-making arena. Confirming Skocpol and Fiorina’s contentions, Lee (2007) shows that not only the strength (in terms of membership) of labor unions in a country but above all their degree of centrality in society has a strong empirical relationship to several quality of government indicators in the 50 countries studied. Centrality refers to the extent to which union members also belong to a variety of *other* associations (cultural, religious, political organizations or sports groups). Though labor unions generally do not identify corruption as a central problem in advancing their members’ interests, Lee points out that they do demand the enforcement of rights, the meting out of benefits and the protection of entitlements, all of which require well-functioning political institutions. Labor unions in principle work for the interests of the subordinate classes and therefore support redistributive policies, and redistributive policies presuppose a state not colluding with big business and crippled by corruption (Lee 2007, 588-590).

Lee’s study presents convincing evidence for the case that certain kinds of civil society organizations indeed may act as a countervailing force to state power and the political

elites that benefit from a particularistic state. Lee does not consider alternative explanations for the observed relationship between labor union centrality and corruption, however. The degree to which labor union members are also members of other organizations might to some extent capture the density of associational life more generally, and a rich associational life itself may affect the quality and legality of government performance. Moreover, he does not consider whether the apparent capacity of civil society, and in particular well-enmeshed labor unions, varies in democratic and non-democratic contexts. Questions therefore remain regarding the actual mechanism at work.

Aside from Lee's study, case study research on both corruption mitigation and other related issues offers considerable support for the idea that civil society organizations indeed can affect both prevailing norms in a society but also policies and the behavior of public officials and agents of the state. Examinations of the diffusion of human rights norms has, for example, documented the ability of civil society organizations to play such a role. Social movements and transnational and national human rights activists have in numerous contexts succeeded in framing issues in terms of human rights and thereby affected social practices (Burgerman 1998; Gordon and Nitza present a useful review; Keck & Sikkink 1998).

Moreover, investigations of the efforts of specifically anti-corruption organizations have shown that the ability of civil society organizations to bring about change at least on a local scale is also not implausible. In countries as divergent as the Philippines and Russia, studies document successful efforts by NGOs in changing the attitudes and behavior of both citizens and frontline bureaucrats. In the Philippines, legal aid organizations educate citizens regarding their rights and entitlements and the procedures by which to demand that those rights and entitlements be honored by public officials (Golub 1998). In Russia, anti-corruption NGOs have worked instead directly with lower level state agencies (primarily the police) to raise awareness regarding human rights and the proper use of force in engagements with citizens. The Russian police, realizing citizens' generally low opinion of law enforcement officials, in some cases themselves contact NGOs in order to obtain advice and guidance (Taylor 2006).

Alternative mechanisms: the service provision and socializing functions of civil society

That civil society creates an arena for contestation and an avenue channeling demands and norms into decision-making spaces is not the only conceivable means by which civil society affects the quality of government in a country. A rich associational culture may constrain corruption by at least two other means. First, associations may form (either via grassroots efforts or local interventions by national or transnational organizations) to address the social and economic welfare needs of communities, thereby supplanting the state's role in the provision of public services and infrastructure. In 26 of the 32 countries studied by the Center for Civil Society Studies at John's Hopkins University, the largest share of civil society activity was primarily oriented toward service functions such as education, health and social services, (the remaining organizations were primarily involved in expressive fields: culture, professional and advocacy organizations.) In Peru,

as many as 95 percent of all civil society organizations direct their efforts to service provision (Salamon, Sokolowski, and List 2003, 23-26).

The thesis that levels of corruption in a society may vary depending on the size of the non-profit welfare service sector rests on two assumptions. The first assumption is that civil society service providers would be less prone to venality than public providers. The assumption is to some extent plausible when it comes to locally formed organizations; the formation of a local organization reflects a capacity to solve a collective action dilemma and therefore signals a minimal level of trust among members of the community. It also reflects a shared awareness of mutual interdependence and a preoccupation with the long-term well-being of the community as a whole. The same norms that enable a community to form such an organization in the first place, may deter both service providers and clients of a such an organization from bending rules to increase their own personal gains. If the service providing organizations are more locally based, then the chain of accountability between providers and beneficiaries is quite short, as service recipients belong to the same community as service providers. If on the other hand, service providers are funded by domestic or international donors, they belong to an accountability structure that may be more effective and stringent than governmental evaluations and audits. However, norms of collaboration are not inviolable and chains of accountability leading to international donors not infallible. A recent audit carried out by the Swedish National Audit Office of development projects funded by the Swedish International Development Agency found evidence of improprieties in almost all of 15 projects investigated.

The second assumption implied by the service provision thesis is that a smaller *public* sector also limits the scope and extent of corruption, though most studies find that this is not the case (Hopkin & Rodríguez-Pose 2007; Montinola & Jackman 2002). An exploration of the scope of civil society service provision is nonetheless in order as it has received little empirical attention, and is a theoretically plausible explanation that is also analytically distinct from the size government.

The third mechanism that might account for why a richer civil society reduces the level of corruption in a country comes from work on social capital and its importance for a well-functioning democracy. A rich associational landscape, in which a large proportion of citizens engage in various activities and capacities, may have an indirect but nonetheless purportedly profound importance on democracy by capacitating citizens with skills, democracy-friendly norms and an enhanced understanding of the possibilities and benefits of collaborating with others to achieve common goals (Putnam 1993; 2000). Both social capital theory and theories of participatory democracy have advanced and elaborated claims that citizens' participation in political but also non-political associations provides the necessary foundation for democracy in the formal political system to function properly (Pateman 1970).

The mechanisms by which a rich associational life might contribute to mitigating corruption are similar to the link to democracy more generally. Participation in local organizations, whether those organizations relate to culture, sports, bird-watching or the provision of common goods, may strengthen norms relating to the efficient administration of pooled resources. In other words, participating directly in associational life may

provide an appreciation that such collective efforts are possible and thereby breed an intolerance of the misuse of positions of power and responsibility.

More in line with the theory of social capital, direct involvement in managing small-scale projects involving pooled resources may help to dissolve the belief that others will with certainty take every opportunity to benefit personally from collective efforts. A rich associational life more generally may strengthen networks of reciprocity and mutual trust, which lowers the risk associated with initiating collective more generally. Social capital in a locality or region may thereby enable individuals to solve the social dilemma that breaking patterns of clientelism and corruption entails. Several studies partially or wholly substantiate this theorized mechanism. Wampler (forthcoming) finds that the richness of civil society in a municipality may be a key determinant of the success of participatory budgeting, which increases accountability and weakens clientelistic networks. Gay's (1994) study of a neighborhood association in Rio de Janeiro *favela* also provides an example of how cooperation at the local level, facilitated by trust among the neighborhood's residents, enabled a group of residents to break its dependence on patron networks in the city.

It is, however, worth noting that the link between a vibrant civil society and lower corruption is certainly not as simple as the preceding discussion suggests. Local capacity to organize may equally well be used to extract maximum benefits in electoral clientelism as to break dependence on clientelistic relationships. Gay's (1994) study mentioned above also detailed the experience of a different neighborhood association that chose exactly that tack, promising to all vote for the same candidate in exchange for paved roads and street lighting in the *favela*.

Thus far, the term civil society has been used to capture a broad terrain of clubs, activist groups, neighborhood associations and much more. A few words of clarification is perhaps in order. The three different mechanisms are not merely different theoretical accounts, however, as they imply to some extent different types of organizations. Most obviously, the service provision thesis suggests that the size specifically of the civil society service sector matters for corruption and for this thesis it is irrelevant how numerous other kinds of associations are or how involved the general public is in these organizations. The contestation/representation thesis presumes that what might affect good government is the intensity of activity of publicly oriented organizations, as well as the extent to which these organizations have broad memberships bridging over class lines. Here the analyses will examine a proxy measure that captures the density of development related civil society organizations. Organizations that define their goals as development related are most certainly concerned with public issues, but it is far from certain that they engage actively in public debate. The third mechanism implies an even broader definition of civil society. Putnam's own work (1993) argues that any and all associations generate reciprocity and democracy norms but subsequent discussions have argued convincingly that only certain types of associations may be expected to have such effects while others may actively breed animosity and distrust of the broader society.

Conditions of CSO capacity and the issue of causality

The three broad roles discernable in the existing literature – civil society as the arena for articulating and expressing a broader public interest, civil society as more honest provider

of services, and civil society as socializing citizens in democratic skills and norms and as an organizational structure for mobilization – are by no means mutually exclusive (Taylor 2006, 198). Archon Fung (2003) has argued that the various roles may be more or less effective, and therefore more or less prevalent, depending on the institutional environment in the country at a given time. Authoritarian regimes might prompt citizens to take on an adversarial and perhaps antagonistic role, while civil society might to a greater extent deal with self-expression or solving local collective concerns in more consolidated democracies (Fung 2003, 534). A number of other studies have documented the causal role of government institutions in shaping the associational landscape.

Taking these complexities into account has implications for this study in at least two ways. First, they introduce the issue of reverse causality, which will receive more thorough consideration below. Second, they point to the fact that the specifics of the political regime might not only affect the associational landscape, but also the means and opportunities available to, and also seemingly appropriate for, organizations that seek to influence policy and political practices. With respect to the mechanism relating to contestation and accountability, the extent to which the political system is responsive and transparent greatly affects the capacity of actors to spot misdeeds, hold government accountable, and transmit public demands in salient decision-making arenas. Even if organizations in non-democratic systems employed strategies and seek to give voice to a discourse articulating a broad public interest, these efforts would fall on fallow ground if a free and pluralistic media did not come to its aid, or a lack of political competition rendered the political leadership less susceptible to public opinion. The analyses presented here therefore consider not only whether and by what means civil society may contribute to curbing corruption, but in what kind of political system, defined here following Alvarez et al's (1996) classification of countries as either a democracy or dictatorship.

The nature of the political system also affects, as mentioned above, civil society in numerous ways, both in terms of the density, the strategies and aims, and the organizational structure of civil society groups. Associations in an increasingly federal United States tended to assume a federal structure (Skocpol, Ganz and Munson 2000); civil society organizations in highly oppressive regimes such as Weimar Germany or the Jim Crow laws in the United States actively supported and contributed to the oppression of minorities (Armony 2004); a more democratic regime will tolerate the emergence of a citizens' groups (Paxton 2002); and a state characterized by rule of law will provide a framework that fosters interpersonal trust (Rothstein & Kumlin 2005) all of which might contribute strongly to the emergence of a strong civil society. In this spirit, Sidney Tarrow (1996) has advanced a reinterpretation of Robert Putnam's (1993) findings, arguing instead that the varying levels of political development many centuries ago in Italy's various regions, in combination with other historical events, account for variations in civil society today.

With respect to the service provision thesis, corruption may also be a cause rather than a consequence. Poor quality public services may prompt people to select an exit strategy and instead collaborate with others to secure the provision of needed services. Evidence of such opting out has been documented by several authors regarding Latin America,

where the middle classes in particular have turned to this alternative (Jacobs & Moldonado 2005).

In order to be able to discern if a relationship actually exists between civil society activity and propriety in government, and if so if there are any grounds for presuming that civil society in fact may contribute to government probity rather than being a response to the institutional landscape, the analyses seek to take into account any other factors that might explain levels of corruption, civil society activity, and especially those factors that might explain both. Two such explanations are particularly salient for investigation: economic development and democratic openness.

Numerous studies now confirm that a factor consistently and strongly linked to levels of political corruption in a country is its level of economic development, most frequently measured as GDP per capita. Economists have long argued and sought to determine the direction of causality in this relationship, a debate which has generated ample evidence on their interdependence and few conclusive results regarding which comes first (Lambsdorff 2006). The simple explanation for the mixed empirical results is of course that reality defies such simple explanations. Neither economic growth nor the emergence of more impartial and predictable government institutions can occur entirely without the other. To make matters worse, some sorts of economic growth seem to impede the consolidation of political institutions and some forms of corruption may facilitate economic growth, a phenomenon observed in the newly industrializing economies of East Asia, (Rock and Bonnett 2004).

In order to isolate the effect of civil society activity on corruption, the analysis ought therefore to sort out to what extent economic growth might account for both the strength of civil society activity as well as the level of corruption in a country. Since political institutions play a key role in economic growth, controlling for GDP per capita in effect means that one also controls for the quality of government institutions at earlier points in time. Corruption may have considerable implications for the business and investment environment, and the lag time between changes in corruption and economic growth may in some cases be relatively short. A sudden increase in large scale corruption in for example procurement or bidding for contracts may force foreign investors to rethink investments in a country, or the use of political power to reward regime friendly firms and punish others (observed in contemporary Russia, *Economist* 2008) may force domestic entrepreneurs into bankruptcy. To the extent that an increase in corruption has relatively short term consequences for the economy, controlling for GDP per capita on corruption assessments from the same year as corruption measures may in theory therefore mean controlling for levels of corruption in a fairly recent historical past.

There is no simple means of including this relevant explanatory variable while entirely avoiding building in a tautology in the model. In an effort to minimize the problem, the analyses control for GDP per capita at an earlier point in time (1995). This measure captures the significance of economic development for quality of government on a more historical scale without making the model overly redundant.

The degree of basic freedoms and political competition in a country, in short the degree of democratic liberalization, is a second factor that may account for lower levels of corruption and may also explain the richness of civil society (Montinola and Jackman

2002; Lindstedt & Naurin 2006). The models therefore also control for levels of press freedom and the number of years a country has been a democracy which Gerring & Thacker (2004), as well as Treisman (2000) find to be a more powerful predictor of corruption than current levels of democracy. Other factors, such as the design of the electoral system and the structure of the political system are not included in the analyses as they presumably have little bearing on civil society activity.

The analyses also take into account certain social development indicators which, along with GDP per capita, allows us to some extent rule out reverse causality. A state that creates an environment conducive to economic growth and that provides citizens with the social resources of health and education, also creates an environment amenable to a vibrant civil society. Including literacy rates in the model to some extent takes this possibility into account.

Data and Measurement

The study uses three different sources of data to capture civil society activity: a directory of development related organizations compiled by CIVICUS (a global network of civil society organizations), a study conducted at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies, and the World Values Survey. Each of these three has advantages and drawbacks and provides a different measure of civil society. The first simply lists organizations per country, the second assesses the proportion of the active work force that is involved in various sorts of organizations, and the third builds on individual level surveys of membership and degree of involvement. While the World Values survey is quite well known, a brief word on the other two data sources is in order.

The Johns Hopkins study builds on data gathered from four sources of data: 1) “official economic statistics (e.g., employment surveys, population surveys), particularly those that included coverage of civil society organizations, giving, or volunteering. ... [2] Data assembled by umbrella groups or intermediary associations representing various types of civil society organizations, or industries in which civil society organizations are active; [3] Specialized surveys of civil society organizations; and [4] Population surveys, focusing particularly on giving and volunteering” (Salamon, Sokolowski and List 2003, 11). These data provide a detailed portrait of the activities, sources of funding, reliance on paid and volunteer staff, and several other aspects of organizational life in each country.

While the methodology of the Johns Hopkins study inspires confidence regarding the reliability of data, the number of countries included (up to 35, fewer for some aspects of the analysis) precludes extensive comparative analyses among countries. The countries included cover a range of regions and historical trajectories, and in order to investigate patterns associated with the size and political consequences of civil society, these factors must be taken into account. The analyses therefore also build on data gleaned from the CIVICUS directory. While the Johns Hopkins study and the World Values Survey employ fairly well established social science methods, the CIVICUS directory is compiled for the development community and does not purport to be an exhaustive register of all organizations. Organizations may themselves ask to be included but otherwise are identified primarily through public sources on the internet. A comparison of the 35 countries for which the Johns Hopkins study has collected data presents one means of validating the directory data. Though the two provide different means of measuring

civil society (the directory a simple count, adjusted for population size, of development organizations, the Johns Hopkins study a measure of the proportion a country's workforce active in civil society), the two measures correlate respectably (Pearson's $r=0.63$, $p<0.001$). The discrepancy between the two may reflect inaccuracies in the directory data but may also stem from the fact that the directory encompasses only development related organizations while the Johns Hopkins study surveyed all civil society organizations.

The analyses build on the World Bank's measure of corruption defined as the exercise of public power for private gain. The measure builds on the perceptions of experts and key sources and spans from -2.5 to 2.5 with higher values representing lower corruption. With the exception of the measures of civil society, this and all the measures used in this analysis are included in the publicly available database compiled by the Quality of Government Institute (www.qog.pol.gu.se), Gothenburg University.

The analyses also control for whether a country is a democracy or authoritarian regime using the categories defined by Alvarez and colleagues (1996). The categorization is also used to investigate whether the relationship between the density of civil society and levels of corruption differs in democracies and dictatorships. The classification of regimes builds on three elements relating to the degree of political competition in a country: 1) whether the executive is directly or indirectly elected, 2) whether the legislative assembly is directly elected, and 3) whether more than one party exists and has a reasonable chance of winning elections (Alvarez et al 1996, 7-10). Based on these rules, 84 countries are classified as democracies and 72 as authoritarian regimes.³ The classification corresponds with the Freedom House groupings into free, partially free and not free countries, with all 84 'democratic' countries in the Alvarez classification being categorized as 'free' by Freedom House.

Finally, the analyses also take into consideration the following factors: Ethnic fractionalization as measured by the "probability that two randomly selected people from a given country will not belong to the same ethnolinguistic group. The higher the number, the more fractionalized society" (Teorell, Holmberg & Rothstein 2008, 57; see Alesina et al 2003 for a more detailed explanation); the Freedom House measure of free press, which takes into account legal restrictions on the media, as well as political pressures and controls that may distort press freedom (the scale ranges from 0 'least free' to 100 'most free'); the number of years a country has been a democracy between 1930 and 2000 (Treisman 2007); and an estimate of the percentage of the adult population that are literate (Vanhanen 2003).

Results

Although the three questions speak to each other, the analysis of each has distinct data requirements and will therefore be addressed one at a time. The first question, to reiterate, was whether the richness of associational life has any bearing on the quality of government in a country and whether the relationship differs between democracies and dictatorships. The analyses presented below suggest that a richer associational life does enhance quality of government, though to varying degrees given the institutional arrangements in the country and also perhaps via different mechanisms simultaneously.

³ In Latin America, Cuba, Ecuador and Paraguay are considered non-democratic.

Furthermore, the intensity of civil society activity seems to matter not only in more industrialized democracies but also in countries with less well established democratic institutions.

The first theorized mechanism linking civil society activity to the quality of governing processes related to the capacity of civil society to represent the public in a direct sense either by contributing to the emergence of a discourse favorable to the public interest, or by exerting pressure to hold public officials accountable for deeds, practices or (non)decisions. If this mechanism is at work, the strength of civil society should presumably have a stronger bearing on the incidence of corruption in countries with political institutions that are more receptive to public discourse and sensitive to public opinion.

Looking first at all countries regardless of the nature of the political system, the number of development civil society organizations in a country does correspond with the level of corruption in the country, independent of factors such as economic development, freedom of the press and ethnic diversity (Table 1, model 1). The effect is, however, not substantively strong and marginally statistically significant ($p=0.06$). As mentioned above, if civil society acts in the capacity theorized above, the strength of civil society should matter more in democratic countries. The second model in table 1 suggests that this indeed is the case.

Figure 1 and 2 here

In democracies, the density of development civil society organizations in the country has a considerably stronger and more certain relationship with government corruption. As figures 1 and 2 show, the relationship is not linear but can be made more so by taking the natural log (\ln) of the number of civil society organizations per capita. While taking the natural log of the key independent variable allows for a more accurate model, it also makes interpreting the coefficient more difficult. Concretely, then, the difference in the average level of corruption in countries with sparse civil societies (the 5th percentile, approximately 0.3 organizations per million inhabitants) and countries in which civil society organizations are comparatively quite dense (the 95th percentile, circa 47 organizations per million inhabitants) is roughly 0.6 on the -2.5 to 2.5 corruption scale.⁴ The fact that the curve is log-linear rather than linear indicates, however, that an increase from very low to moderate density of civil society is associated with a more substantial reduction in corruption than an increase from moderate density to high density.

Table 1 here

An examination of the standardized coefficients reveals that, in line with the findings of most other studies, the level of economic development in the country proves to have the strongest relationship with corruption estimates, followed by freedom of the press and measures of democracy. The density of civil society emerges as almost as important as the more general measures of democracy, however, and more important than factors pointed to by earlier studies such as ethnic fractionalization (Alesina et al 2003) and the number of years a country has been a democracy (Treisman 2007).

⁴ The difference in corruption in countries with sparse versus dense civil societies ($=0.559$) was computed as follows: $\ln 47(0.11) - \ln 0.3(0.11)$, where 0.11 is the estimate for the effect of civil society in democratic countries.

The fact that the density of civil society is linked to higher levels of probity only in democracies seems to lend support for the argument that civil society can serve to generate a discourse on norms related to a specific aspect of public interest, in this case anti-corruption. Development CSOs, like unions, represent the interests of the lower classes and may pressure public officials to provide goods and services, or enable neighborhoods and communities to organize and break dependence on local patrons. These organizations may also provide a structure within which information and norms that are relevant to anti-corruption work may dissipate, both downwards to citizens but also upwards to civil society organizations that are more well-connected with political decision makers. In non-democratic countries, however, the density of civil society has no relation at all with levels of corruption.

Before turning to the next set of analyses, it is necessary to address a question regarding the geographic scope of the findings presented here. The source of data on civil society density is, to reiterate, a directory of development (broadly defined) related organizations. In more affluent societies, many of those organizations have as their primary focus not the needs, wants and desires of the citizens of their own country but instead to contribute to social and economic development in other parts of the world. To assess whether it is north-to-south development organizations predominantly in OECD countries that drive the results, the model was run including only non-OECD countries, plus Mexico and Turkey. Though somewhat substantively smaller ($b=0.09$, $p=0.07$), the analysis reveals a relationship between civil society activity and corruption in non-OECD countries as well. The difference between countries with sparse and dense civil societies (5th compared to 95th percentile cases) is in this subset of countries still 0.45 on the -2.5 to 2.5 corruption scale.

Turning to the second question of whether increased *service provision* by CSOs correspond to lower corruption, the analysis produces only weak support for this thesis. This analysis seeks to determine whether the effects observed in the previous section might be the result of the service provision mechanism. Precluding this explanation will further strengthen the interpretation that the above effects are the result of representation, contestation and accountability as argued.

Data compiled by the Johns Hopkins University Center for Civil Society Studies provides a more fine-grained but also more reliable portrait of civil society in a sample of 35 countries, allowing for an examination of whether the service provision mechanism seems to be at work. The Johns Hopkins study evaluated not only the number of associations but also statistics such as the number of individuals active as volunteers and paid employees, sources of funding and the primary field of activity of each organization (Salamon, Sokolowski and List 2003). For the countries included in their study, it is therefore possible to assess the relationship between corruption in a country and the size of the civil society sector providing services compared to CSOs with other fields of activity. Those other fields of activities predominantly relate to functions that the authors label expressive: advocacy, the environment, culture and professional organizations. In the total sample, four percent of the civil society sector deal with neither of these (1% foundations, 1% international and 2% other). Does, then, the provision of a larger share of welfare services by civil society organizations coincide with lower levels of corruption in the country? As table two reveals: yes, but not independent of other factors.

Table 2 here

The models presented in table 2 suggest that the relative size of the service providing non-governmental sector has little bearing on the level of corruption in the country. As the relatively strong bivariate correlation coefficient indicates, the two factors do overlap with one another. To give a sense of the association between corruption and service CSOs, countries with comparatively sparse civil society activity (lowest 5th percentile) rank on average 2.2 steps lower on the -2.5 to 2.5 scale than countries with dense civil societies in the service sector (the 95th %-ile). The corresponding figure for non-service CSOs is 3 steps.

The empirical overlap seems, in the case of service CSOs, to reflect the fact that both factors are associated with economic well-being and the level of democratic openness in the country. When GDP per capita and freedom of the press are entered into the model (a somewhat pared down model due to the limited number of observations), the extent of civil society service provision does not retain a relationship with the level of corruption in a country. The strength of expressive civil society organizations does, on the whole, however, seem to reduce levels of corruption, confirming the results reported in table 1. Controlling for other factors such as government spending on health as percentage of GDP, the number of years a country has been a democracy since 1930, the level of democracy in the country, the extent of ethnic fractionalization does not substantially affect any of the coefficients or significance levels reported in table 2. Countries in which a larger share of the workforce is active in civil society associations tend to have lower levels of corruption, and this relationship does not seem to stem from the fact that richer, more well established democracies do better on both accounts.

The preceding analyses have shown that the density of associations in a society matters for corruption, and that the mechanism does not seem to be service provision. The question remains however, of whether the observed relationship between civil society and corruption might not be via the mechanism of *socialization* rather than via the mechanism of representation and contestation as suggested. Contemporary followers of de Tocqueville maintain that involvement in associations instills norms and develops skills necessary in a democratic society.

The analyses presented in table 3 indicate that while the level of social (interpersonal) trust in a country, a central component of social capital, does correspond to levels of corruption, it does not seem to account for the link between the number of development organizations and corruption. The first analysis presented in Table 3 replicates the analyses presented for question one but including only those countries for which World Values Survey is available, and including only the variables that proved most relevant in explaining corruption, GDP and free press. In those 60 countries, CSO density still relates to corruption, although the effect appears less substantial than in the preceding analyses. Introducing two possible intervening variables, social trust and support for democracy as a system of governance, has no bearing on this relationship. It remains completely unchanged. Interestingly, social trust has an independent and approximately equally strong relationship as that of CSO density ($\beta=0.13$ compared to that of CSO density, $\beta=0.10$). In other words, while citizens' norms of reciprocity may matter for corruption,

they do not seem to interfere strongly with the explanatory power of the number of development CSOs in the country.⁵

Discussion and Conclusions

Large-N comparative analyses that encompass all or nearly all countries of the world, by their very nature paint social and political reality in very broad brush strokes, ignoring complexities, intricacies, and reducing enormous variation into single measures. Civil society in Jordan is certainly not a close cousin of civil society in Sweden, nor of that in Costa Rica. Any patterns found in such sweeping comparisons must of course be fleshed out with more in-depth studies to verify, and more importantly add detail to, the patterns detected in analyses such as these. That said, sweeping comparisons have the advantage of detecting precisely that: patterns.

The analyses presented here suggest that a pattern does exist between the strength of civil society and the level of government corruption in a country, though only in polities with democratic regimes. According to two different measures of the richness of civil society – first as the number of development related CSOs relative to population size, and second as the proportion of the work force involved in CSOs – democracies with richer associational landscapes tend to demonstrate lower levels of corruption, other relevant factors such as average wealth, level of democracy and the freedom of the press being equal.

Furthermore, the findings suggest that the potential of civil society to affect government performance lies in its capacity to channel a discourse, either from the grassroots level or from the global arena, into the public sphere, ultimately shaping the ideas regarding needed reforms and appropriate behavior. Several points of the analysis support this conclusion. First, the fact that strength of civil society only mattered in democratic countries suggests that the responsiveness of the political system, as well as the extent of discursive space available to the actors in the system, affect the capacity of civil society to mitigate corruption. This finding is more difficult to interpret using other theoretical accounts of the role of civil society in enhancing the quality of government. In addition, the alternative theoretical accounts (that civil society presents a less corrupt alternative for welfare services, or that civil society socializes citizens in the fundamentals of collaborative efforts) receive less convincing support in this study, and do not even slightly detract from the observed relationship between the density of civil society organizations and corruption. The evidence is admittedly circumstantial but, again, the investigations presented here demonstrate that a fairly robust pattern exists.

If one were to formulate policy recommendations based on these findings, it might in support of anti-corruption aid that channels money into civil society activity, provided that the country in question is democratic. Support for civil society organizations in non-democratic may not have the same beneficial effects for good governance, however. The rather modest, albeit robust, relationship between the density of civil society and

⁵ The number of organizations that people belong to (also measured in the World Values Survey) also has an effect on corruption that is independent of CSO density. Unfortunately, that question was asked in fewer countries, and once free press is controlled for, neither CSO density nor the number of organizations people belong to have a relationship with corruption.

corruption suggests, however, that investments in civil society might not give overwhelming returns in the form of better government practices.

That said, it is important again to remind ourselves that the measure of civil society used here perhaps may not capture the full effect of civil society activity. Numerous organizations have emerged in many countries around the world whose main aim and objective is to work to combat corruption. More penetrating studies of the organizational strategies but also contextual factors that determine the success of these organizations are needed.

Table 1. The effect of CSOs on levels of corruption.

Model 1	B (β)	Model 2, with interaction term	B (β)
Constant	0.12		0
CSOs per million inhabitants (ln)	0.05 (0.06) p=0.13	In democracies	0.11 (0.16)***
		In non-democracies	-0.01 (0)
Non-democracy	0.30 (0.15)***		0.54 (0.27)
Free press	-0.01 (-0.35)***		0.02 (0.36)***
Yrs of democracy since 1930	0 (0.05)		0 (0.04)
GDP per cap 1995	0 (0.7)***		0 (0.7)***
Ethnic Fractionalization	-0.33 (-0.09)		-0.32 (-0.08)**
% Literates	0 (-0.10)**		0 (-0.10)
N	145		145
R ² _{adj}	0.82		0.82

Standardized coefficients in parentheses.

* p<.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table 2. The effect of the size of the CSO service sector on levels of corruption

	Bivariate models B (β)	Multivariate model B (β)
Constant		
% workforce in service CSOs	0.23 (0.59)***	0.03 (0.08)
% workforce in other CSOs	0.63 (0.78)***	0.17 (0.21)**
Free press		0.03 (0.40)***
GDP per cap 1995		0 (0.40)***
% Literates		n.s.
N	30	29
R ² _{adj}	0.32 and 0.56	0.90

Standardized coefficients in parentheses.

* p<.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Table 3. Exploring mechanisms of the effect of civil society density on corruption: social capital and norms of democracy

	B (β)	B (β)	B (β)
Constant	0.36	0.22	0.27
Number of CSOs per million inhabitants	0.09 (0.10)**	0.09 (0.10)**	0.09 (0.10)**
Interpersonal trust		0.96 (0.13)***	
Democratic norms			0.05 (0.05)
GDP per cap 1995	0 (0.53) ***	0 (0.46) ***	0 (0.49)***
Free press	0.03 (0.45) ***	0.03 (0.45) ***	0.03 (0.45)***
N	60	60	60
R ² _{adj}	0.90	0.91	0.90

Standardized coefficients in parentheses.

* p<.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Fig. 1. Density of CSOs and Control of Corruption-Democracies

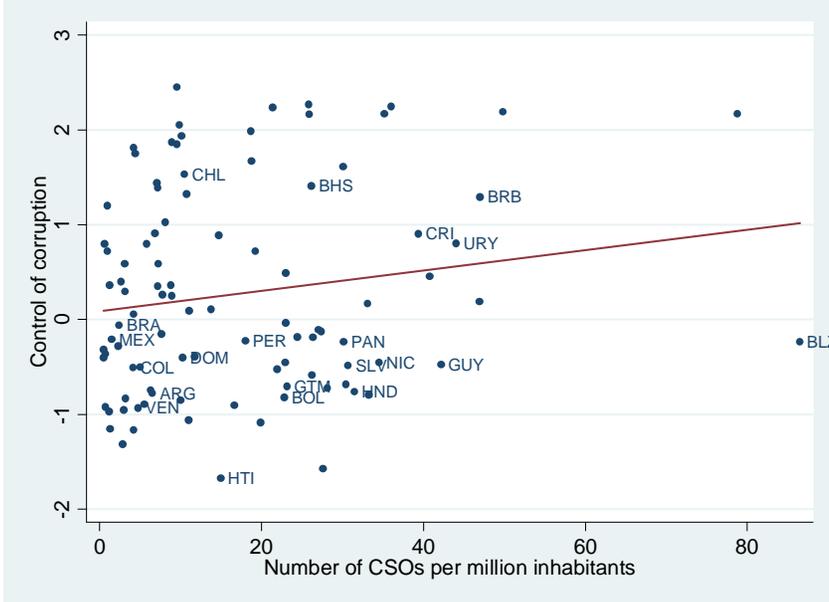


Fig. 2. Density of CSOs (ln) and Control of Corruption-Democracies

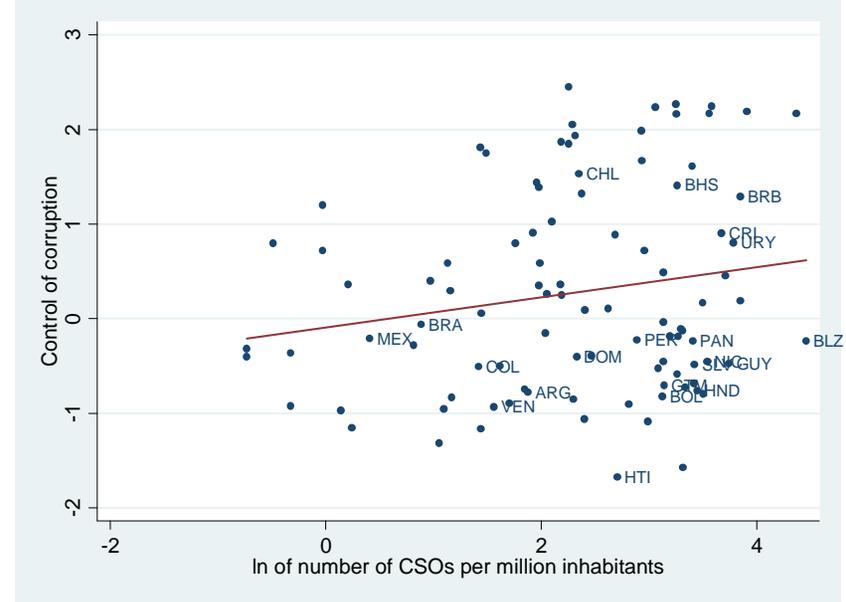


Fig. 3. The density of CSOs and Control of Corruption-Dictatorships

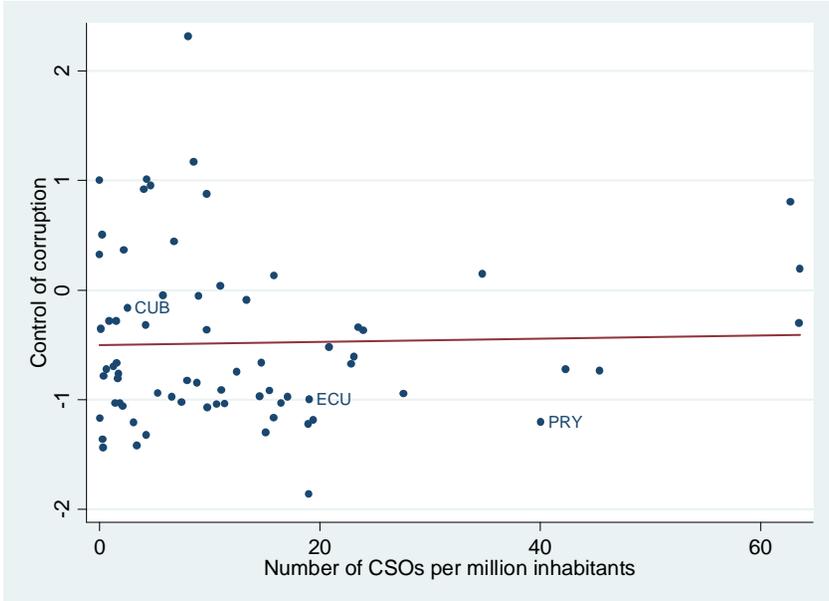
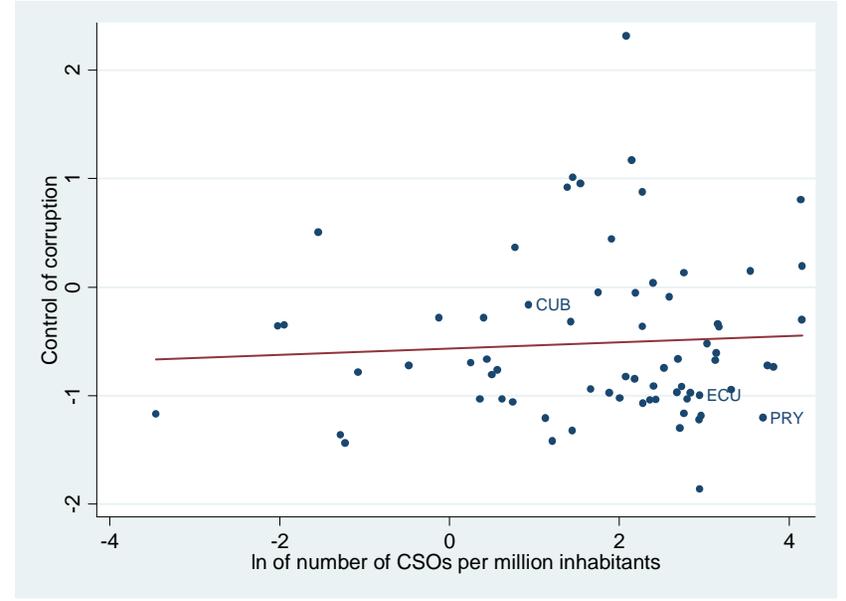


Fig. 4. The Density of CSOs (ln) and Control of Corruption-Dictatorships



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