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Alternative Information

Finding homegrown solutions to foreign development
strategies

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Abstract

The current trend in democracy assistance approaches has made the core of democracy essential to study. Democracy today must grow from within–yet supported from the outside. International donor agencies and donor recipients call for “homegrown” strategies. The question that arises is how this correlates to the theories of liberal democracy. The overall important principal of democracy is to generate and spread alternative information. How this is spread in a politically hostile environment is the core of this essay. Through the social structures of civil society, information finds its way. Or is it so that Western donor agencies facilitate the space necessary for political activism. The aim of this thesis is to illustrate the impact – or non-impact – Western democracy assistance programs have in two Muslim societies. Three decades ago democracy promotion was steered through top-down strategies, funding elections and political parties. After the 1980s the trend shifted to bottom-up strategies. Bolstered by outside assistance, donors envisioned that virtuous civil societies of democratic-minded groups would erode authoritarian regimes. These two strategies are examined by two case studies on countries in a transformational process. The essay concludes that a homegrown democratic strategy may impose different ideas among the variety of members in developing societies and that the international democracy assistance community faces challenges designing indigenous strategies in politically restricted settings. Jordan and Kyrgyzstan will illustrate societies in change, dependent on foreign aid – craving for homegrown solutions.

Key words: democratization, Jordan, Kyrgyzstan, homegrown, information, civil society

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1 Introduction

As successful change comes from within, democracy today must grow from within. Democratic development must be rooted in the heart of political culture – yet develop with democratic assistance from the outside. There is to this day no single model of democracy valid for all countries and contexts. However, a healthy democracy is homegrown – not imported. Nevertheless, a clear understanding of what democracy is about, is a significant condition for behaving democratically, as “wrong” ideas about democracy can make a democratic development go wrong. If a political system ought to find its support in the depths of political culture, promoting democracy in politically hostile environments is not an easy target. The challenge is to correlate intrinsic democratic principles with “homegrown” development strategies.

1.1 The Aim of the Thesis

In my thesis, I attempt to analyse a general approach on generating and spreading alternative information in a democratisation process. At the centre of the inquiry is the international democracy assistance programmes in relation to recipients in form of a homegrown, political context. Few authoritarian regimes develop democratically, despite an important amount of international aid. One could possibly argue that they would have some influence considering the amount of money that each year is funded to developing programmes. Thus the question arises to what effect the funded programmes really have on political, democratic, development. To analyse the impact or non-impact the international donors have on local political environment, I have drawn together theories of democratically spread information and the social capital civil society structures engender. The research question of this study is:

Homegrown organisations with no form of political governing will be better than donor strategy plans organisations with any form of political governing to implement the democratic criteria to generate and spread alternative information

1.2 Theoretical Approach

Undistorted information is a necessity for making appropriate choice. In political matters, it is even more so. Alternative sources of information are highly important in a democratic context. With an emphasis on Robert Dahl, but also theorists of political communication, where information for providing a basis for action is central, this essay takes its point of departure. Civil society gained enormous response in democracy promotion two decades ago. Civil society is often described as the public sphere, which generates the basis for open circulating information. It is in the structures within the public sphere citizens learn how to be political and formulate its interest. Regarding this thesis, much of the theoretical framework on the civil society is based on James Coleman's concept of how informational communication inheres in the structures of social capital, and Robert Putnam who correlated the social capital to democratic insight and behaviour. Theories of civil society provide a framework for the informational structures in society. However, I do not attempt to provide a thorough background on civil society but merely focus on those aspects central for my study.

1.3 Method and Material

To analyse and examine the democratisation process in relation to democracy programmes funded by international donor agencies, this study was designed as a case study comparing two phenomena (Eckstein 1992: 152). The theoretical framework makes an empirical comparison visible. The theories are the tools for interpretation and analyse of intrinsic functions of democratic transformation. I introduce the concept of "homegrown" as opposed to systems implemented from the outside.

1.3.1 The Case Studies

A number of regimes raised during the last decade cannot be "classified as either authoritarian or democratic but display some characteristics of both". In short, they are political hybrids. These are regimes that "allow little real competition for power, thus reducing government accountability" yet leaving "enough space for political parties and organizations of civil society to form, for an independent press to function to some extent, and for some political debate to take place" (Ottaway 2003: 3). Both Jordan and Kyrgyzstan fall under this definition.

Jordan and Kyrgyzstan have both shown signs on democratic development. Yet civil society and the free press are restricted. The two countries cases have several elements in common. They share the same numbers on Freedomhouse's¹ survey, they have both been under colonial/incorporated rule, they both receive an important share of developmental aid. Both countries are inhabited by a majority of Sunni-Muslims, although Jordan is the only Arab-Muslim of the two. Cultural backgrounds go back to tribal nomadic population. As for my study, top-down democracy strategies are illustrated with the case of Jordan and bottom-up by Kyrgyzstan.

Some question the promotion of democracy through electoral assistance around the world arguing that it has been "responsible for the rise of illiberal democracy" referring to freely elected governments that fail to safeguard basic liberties, i.e. democracy without constitutional liberalism (see Zakaria 1997). Others argue that democratic development is precisely achieved through top-down strategies, that multiparty elections foster liberalisation and have a self-reinforcing power that promotes increasing democratic behaviour (see Lindberg 2004). Alternatively, some has stressed civil society's potential democracy-building functions (see Boussard 2003) and the shift from supporting and fostering free and fair elections in the early 1990s to promoting the idea of civil society as central to thriving democracy advocated the support of civil society developments as a necessary part of democracy promotion (Ottaway&Carrothers 2000: 293).

The material for the studies is based on secondary research references and official reports from the European Union, the USAID, and International IDEA. From the donors' point of view the material may be biased.

¹ Political Rights Score: 5 (7), Civil Liberties Score: 4 (7), Status: Partly Free
Population: Kyrgyzstan 5 200 000 Jordan 5 600 000

2 Alternative Information

The history of the idea of democracy is complex and is marked by conflicting conceptions and definitions (Held 1987: 2). However, one needs only little knowledge of Greek to understand the *word* democracy. (Sartori 1965: 3). By its terminology we know it refers to “power of the people”, derived from the Greek word “demos”, meaning people or the whole citizen body living within a particular city-state, and “kratos” meaning authority or rule (Held 1987: 2). As a concept, democracy has broadly been defined, in general terms, as a unique system for “organising the relations between the rulers and the ruled” (Schmitter & Karl 1993: 40).

Trying to find a general concept of democracy and its procedures, democracy is a “classic example of an ‘essentially contested’ concept (Gallie in Landman) and it is likely that there will never be a final consensus on its definition or full content (Landman 2007: 2). Larry Diamond notes that still, over twenty years after the “third wave”² of democratisation, as Huntington so famously called it, there is still little agreement on what practices ‘democracy’ really constitutes (Diamond 2002: 21). However, the idea that democracy is a form of governance based on some degree of *popular sovereignty* and *collective decision-making* remains largely uncontested (Landman 2007: 2).

Since *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* first was published in 1942, Joseph Schumpeter has highly influenced the discourse on democracy (Rindefjäll 1998: 29). Schumpeter did not believe that democracy as a system, ought to carry out the “common good”; there is no such thing as the common good. Instead, following a minimalistic definition of the concept, democracy is a method concerning procedures and institutions (Schumpeter 1994: 163-164). Schumpeter’s approach does not stand free from contesting arguments. However, on the study of political systems, his definition is an efficient tool. In his view, the only criteria necessary to distinguish a democratic system from a non-democratic structure, is the practice of electoral procedures (Rindefjäll 1998: 30). The opposing view of procedural democracy has supplemental normative ideals, including the entire society: democracy is not achieved until all relations and spheres in society are democratic: the political, economical, and social (ibid: 27). The recognised political scientist Samuel P. Huntington did just like Schumpeter and approach the minimalistic ideal, rejecting normative tendencies as “fuzzy norms do not yield useful analysis. Elections, open, free, and fair, are the essence of democracy, the inescapable sine qua non” (Huntington 1991: 9).

² Samuel P. Huntington published 1991 *The Third Wave*, in which he presented a framework for understanding the democratisation processes in the 1980s and early 1990s.

Democracy as characterised by a set of rules (primary or basic) which establish *who* is authorised to take collective decisions and which *procedures* are to be applied (Bobbio 1987: 24), has best been described by one of the foremost authorities in the field of democracy research, Robert A. Dahl. Though introducing a set of procedural criteria for democracy, Dahl in contrary to Schumpeter and Huntington, has more normative approaches. Dahl argued that in reality, no state fulfils the normative ideal of democracy. Hence, he introduced the term *polyarchy*, as an empirical reflection of society (Dahl 1971). However, the term polyarchy is thus commonly referred to as democracy, the normative approached being nearly the same: all full citizens ought to have unimpaired opportunities; to formulate their preferences; to signify their preferences to their fellow citizens and the government by individual and collective action; to have their preferences weighed equally in the conduct of the government, that is, weighed within no discrimination because of the content or source of the preference (Dahl 1971: 2).

What distinguishes Dahl from Schumpeter and Huntington the most, is that Dahl emphasises the importance of rights such as political freedom, the freedom of expression, the freedom of the press – which means alternative sources of information – the right to vote, and the freedom to form and join associations (Dahl 1971: 3, Rindfjäll 1998: 32).

2.1 Access to Information

In *Democracy and its critics*, Robert Dahl identified five criteria that could determine whether an organisation (or state?) is democratic or not, as well as those democratic institutions that are necessary to satisfy the criteria distinguished (Dahl 1989: 221):

1. *Effective participation* – associational autonomy, freedom of expression, alternative information
2. *Voting equality* – needing institutions like free and fair elections, elected officials, inclusive suffrage, right to run for office, freedom of expression, alternative information
3. *Enlightened understanding* – see above
4. *Control of the agenda* – see above
5. *Inclusion* – associational autonomy

In Dahl's words, each citizen of a democratic state ought to have access to and the right to search for alternative sources of information that are not monopolised by the government or any other single group (Dahl 1989: 221, 223). To participate efficiently, *associational autonomy* is merely a function to deliberate and share information with one another, e.g. the "freedom to associate with others ensures the access to alternative sources of information" (Sundström 2001: 158). Brian McNair, a political scientist within the field of political communication, argues that the absence of genuine choice, i.e. the absence of pluralism is a significant limitation to the very notion of democracy itself (McNair 2003: 24).

Suffice to say, Sundström notes that to be able to function as an efficient member of society, each citizen requires a certain flow of information (Sundström 2001: 118). And in the line of Habermas's (1979) work on the political public sphere, Steven Barnett points out that the ability and freedom to engage in "free, collective discussion is an essential precondition for good citizenship", and that in any discussion of a properly functioning democracy, the conception of an informed public sphere remains central (Barnett 1997: 196). Sartori stated that what democracy is cannot be separated from what democracy should be (Sartori 1965: 4,5). And, as Dahl points out, there should be little doubt to that a democratic political structure would make it likely that the 'people' would get what it wants (Dahl 1989: 112). The obstacle, on the other hand, would more likely to be to actually *know* what it wants.

Consequently, to obtain an effective, "healthy", democracy, a more knowledgeable citizenry is desirable. Steven Barnett puts forward information and knowledge: rational debate; participation; and representation as constitutive elements of the conception of democracy. He notes that

The citizens' understanding of issues and arguments should be fostered by the availability of relevant, undistorted information; access to collective rational debate in which citizens can deliberate and develop their own arguments; participation in democratic institutions, whether through voting, membership of a party, trade union or pressure group, attendance at political events or through some other national or local political activity; and making use of the representative process by communicating with and holding accountable elected representatives at local, national or international levels (Barnett 1997: 195).

Citizens "make mistakes about the means to the ends and also choose ends they would reject if they were more enlightened" (Dahl 1989: 11). A citizen of a democratic state is assumed to be capable of revising the "conception of the good" on reasonable and rational grounds. In addition, as citizens, they have been given moral power to rationally *pursue* a conception of the good (Rawls 1996: 30). Accordingly, the citizen should absorb available information and make appropriate choice that in turn is converted into political behaviour (McNair 2003: 25).

2.2 The Art of Inducing the People

Having that said, the ability to actually use information in the analysis of political issues and the devising of influence strategies, Almond and Verba noted³ that democratic competence is strongly related to having valid information about political issues and processes (Almond&Verba 1963: 95). Seymour Martin Lipset noted that different groups in society may have equal chance in government policies but that some groups might have easier access to information than others (Lipset 1981: 196). Understanding citizens' use of information, how it is perceived and what signals it sends, e.g. news content, is central. The production, formatting, and distribution of political information illustrate how the political communication environment shapes both the information available and the ways ordinary people use it in thinking about politics (Bennet & Entman 2001: 6).

Gathering information for public choices Popkin notes that voters⁴ are, for the most part, not very well informed about the details of public policy and government activities. In deciding what issues to focus on and which candidates to vote for, voters are in general affected by information about what other voters are doing (Popkin 1994: 10-11). Education on complex social problems is important as it surely contributes to higher participation in the elections. However, Lipset notes, voters may still be induced to vote by social pressures and inner feelings of social obligations. Voting behaviour correlates with socioeconomic factors and to "different degrees of conformity to the dominant norms in various societies" (Lipset 1981: 197, 207). Subsequently, in Sundström's words, democratic interaction, and democracy, could be seen in terms of information and information inter-change; the actors being seen as information "nodes". The information patterns regarding the democratic structure, illustrates at the same time how it enables and restricts the actors (Sundström 2001: 114). Benjamin Barber utters, that it is the "active consent of participating citizens who have imaginatively reconstructed their own values as public norms through the process of identifying and empathising with the value of others" (Barber 1984: 137), that is decisive, i.e. not the consent *per se*.

Writing in the 1920s, Walter Lippmann referred to something he called 'manufactured consent' meaning that even if/when citizens would arrive at a democratic 'consent', politicians would use techniques of social psychology in combination with the vast mass media, to manufacture that consent (McNair

³ The survey, aiming at classifying various types of political culture contained two measures of information on five countries, i.e. U.S., U.K., Germany, Italy and Mexico; one was based on the ability to identify the national leaders of the principal parties, and the second was based on the ability to identify cabinet offices or departments at the national level of government (Almond&Verba 1963: 79).

⁴ Results from three case studies carried out to demonstrate the utility for analysing political campaigns, in the U.S. based on theories drawn from voting studies done at Columbia University in the 1940s; theoretical contributions to the economics of information; and certain ideas from modern cognitive psychology (Popkin 1994: 7). Successive polls in the UK found a woeful inability by electors to identify prominent members of the government or opposition (Barnett 1997: 195).

2003: 26, Herman&Chomsky 1994: xi). Consequently, Lippmann noted that the “art of inducing different people to think alike is practiced in every political campaign” (Lippmann 1922:197). The problematic aspect to this, is that the distinction between ‘persuasion’, which we by Lippman know is a universally recognised function of political actors in a democracy, and *manipulation*, which McNair describes as something that carries negative connotations of propaganda and deceit, is not always clear. Consequently, the access to and spread of alternative information, illustrates an overall important feature of democracy (McNair 2003: 26, 24).

A political system that cuts off, or even suppresses, information is likely to cause citizens to arrive at a different decision than had they had access to relevant information. Likewise, procedures that would give some citizens much easier access than others to information, or present citizens with an agenda of decisions that had to be decided without discussion, are undemocratic (Dahl 1989: 112). Political behaviour based on distorted information is inevitably diminished as citizens are subjected to manipulation. And when citizens are no longer exposed to information, democracy loses its authenticity (McNair: 157, 26).

2.3 Informal Information Gathering

Main sources of information for the electorate are the news media– television, newspapers, radio, and magazines. Some of the information comes directly from the media and some comes from discussions with friends, neighbours, and fellow workers (Popkin 1994: 25).). In the public sphere citizens are not only receiving information, but sending information as well (Sundström 2001: 131). Gathering information to public choices differ from gathering information to private choices (Popkin 1994: 10). However, important to note is that the mass media affect how voters think about government because daily-life information and media information interact. Although daily-life information might tell us how the economy and the government have performed, it takes the media to tell us what the government is actually doing (ibid: 27). In forms of advertisements Sundström notes that each society decides on its own, what standards to accept; but that the *regulation* in this area must be “highly visible and open to democratic debate” (Sundtröm 2001: 131).

2.4 Summary

The importance of an informed, knowledgeable electorate dictates that democratic politics must be pursued in the public arena (as distinct from the secrecy characteristic of autocratic regimes) and that the knowledge and information on

the basis of which citizens will make their political choices, must circulate freely and be available to all (McNair: 19). Considering the fairness of a democratic system, we can only agree with Robert Dahl in that citizens need to have access to alternative information that are not monopolised by the government or any other single group (Dahl 1989: 233).

3 Civil Society

3.1 Trust in the Social Capital

In 1995 the civil society theorist Robert Putnam published, a now famous article titled “Bowling alone: America’s declining Social Capital”. It was later expanded into a book. In both studies he defended a Tocquevillian view that stresses the “importance of a strong active civil society to the consolidation of democracy” (Putnam 1995: 65). Putnam’s argument was that civil society associations generate *social capital*, which refers to a culture of trust, tolerance and reciprocity.

Since then, and even before that, a vast literature has emerged on the concept of civil society. Much of it was inspired by events the late 1980s, but the discussion rapidly extended to cover political development in all corners of the globe. The discourse on civil society varies from what it contains to analysis of its relationship to political processes such as democratisation.⁵ In definitional discussions most authors emphasise civil society as an interdependent sphere between the state and the market (Anderson 2000: 77). It is in this sphere social capital emerges.

Social capital is thought to emanate from the face-to-face interactions between ordinary citizens provided by civil society associations. As long as they are voluntary in nature and created outside the family, the state and the marketplace for the purpose of advancing mutual values and objectives, virtually all associations count (Encarnacion 2003: 4). Thus Putnam’s enormous impact, influencing not only academics but policy-makers as well, his theory was not free from contesting arguments; the choice of historical periods was arbitrarily, and that the distinction between different organisations was vague (Boussard 2003: 84). Putnam’s very definition of social capital, is also problematic as it contains so many different aspects (Rothstein 2003: 95).

Nevertheless, the social capital argument is interesting in the study of democratic development. Democracy is in itself about actors and how these actors interact within a structure (Sundström 2001: 116). And social capital – unlike other forms of capital – is vested in the structure of relations between actors and among actors (Coleman 1988: 104). Coleman who developed the ‘social capital’

⁵ There are plenty of works about the concept of civil society. I do not attempt to provide a detailed account on those (see Cohen & Arato 1994, Hall, 1995, Keane 1988, Kumar 1993).

theoretical framework, noted that the function of social capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations (ibid: 104) and civil society feeds on social communications. It is likely to be more difficult to foster its growth in circumstances where people live in isolation from each other and lack access to means of communications (Hydén 1995: 9).

As we know, information is important in providing a basis for action. The norm of social capital is to act in the interest of the collectivity and social relations constitute a form of social capital that provides information that makes action possible (Coleman 1988: 104). Treated this way, social capital focuses on values and attitudes involving the cooperation, trust, understanding, and empathy that enables citizens to treat each other as fellow citizens, rather than as strangers or potential enemies (Newton 2001: 226). Putnam's argument was that the correlation between social trust and associational membership is close and that civic engagement is the core of the democratic process (Putnam 1995: 77).

3.2 Civil Society and its Uncivil Nature

As its best, civil society should be “self-generating, self-supporting, autonomous from the state, and bound a legal order or set of shared rules. Civil society involves citizens acting collectively in a public sphere to express their interests, passions, and ideas, exchange information, achieve mutual goals, make demands on the state, and hold state officials accountable” (Diamond 1994: 5). Alas, not all associations are necessarily favourable to democratic virtues, and not every part of civil society is “civic minded” (Sullivan in Boussard 2003: 87). Not all social networks create trust among different groups and people in society. The “uncivil” society refers to something illiberal with antidemocratic tendencies (Chambers&Kopstein 2001: 841). It implies that some organisations are of an uncivil nature. However, organisations with antidemocratic goals and methods might still produce such democratic “virtues” as solidarity and trust among their members. Nevertheless, Chambers and Kopstein argue that we must recognise the difference between ‘particularistic’ and democratic civility:

Particularistic civility contains all the goods that are associated with participation (trust, public-spiritedness, self-sacrifice), but only between members of a particular group, and it often encourages the opposite sort of attitude to members outside of the group. Democratic civility, in contrast, extends the goods learned in participation to all citizens regardless of group membership (Chambers&Kopstein 2001: 841).

In the scope of literature on civil society and its democratic features, the definition of ‘uncivil’ nature of civil society does sometimes involve ethnic groups, religious communities and various political and economical networks, that do not act in the interest of the common good. A society that is dominated by networks of this type, is unlikely to create any social capital (Rothstein 2003: 98). Political theorist

Michael Walzer has distinguished a definition commonly referred to. Namely that civil society “*name the space of uncoerced human association and also set o relational networks – formed for the sake of family, faith, interest, and ideology – that fill their space*” (Walzer in Young 2000: 157). Nevertheless, as Benjamin Barber notes, the relational networks of family and faith that fill the space of uncoerced association, are themselves often coercive (Barber 1998: 4).

3.3 The Democratic Force

Like all political constructs, civil society is not singular in meaning or ideological intent. Sprung from a mid-1800th century Europe, characterisations of civil society emanated all from a very distinct and specific social reality. Philosophers like Locke, Tocqueville, Paine, Marx, Hegel and Hobbes, had all different positioning on state organisation and the inclusion or exclusion of different corporate and collective action (Whitehead 1997: 99). However, to track those sociological developments would greatly exceed the purpose of this study.

Associations are today normally seen as interdependent from the state as “neither the market nor the state can be relied upon to even out the uneven social distribution of voluntary associationalism. Not the market because it obeys consumer sovereignty, which is skewed towards high income earners. Not the state, because the sovereignty assembly is also typically skewed towards the most articulate and best-organised groups in the polity” (Whitehead 1997: 101). However, the ‘old images’ help us today make sense of the ‘new versions’ of civil society (Keane 1998: 6).

The philosopher who has gained great prominence in modern times, is the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas (1979). He combined the Marxist tradition that exposes domination in civil society with the liberal tradition that emphasise its role in guarding personal autonomy and constructed a complicated series of theoretical constructs concerning ‘communicative action’, ‘discursive democracy’ and the ‘colonisation of the life world’ (Edwards 2004: 9). For Habermas, and other ‘critical theorists’, a healthy civil society is one “that is steered by its members through shared meanings” that are constructed democratically through the communication structures of the public sphere (Chambers 2002: 94). It is in this realm, the public sphere, where democracy can flourish (Hydén 1995: 6). Civil society is regarded a key to democracy as it provides the basis for the limitation of state power. In authoritarian regimes, actors in civil society need the protection of an institutionalised legal order to guard their autonomy and freedom of action. But a democratic civil society should function for the control of the state (Diamond 1994: 5, 7). The *balance of power* between state and society in favour of the latter, thereby contributing to the kind of ‘balanced opposition’ held to be characteristic of established democratic regimes (White 2004: 13). Civil society carries democratic features as it is both pluralistic and educational at nature. It is pluralistic because it distributes the power in society and in political

life by combining and joining people together in collective action and educational as the openness and accountability of the organisations' structure are in focus as it is the citizens themselves who "furnish the critical foundation stone" (Hadenius&Uggla 1995: 3-4). Parties, movements, unions, and interest groups are schools of a sort, teaching their members the ideas that the groups are organised to advance (Walzer 1999: 59). The words of Carole Pateman fit well into this discourse, that it is by participating that you learn how to participate (Pateman 1970: 105).

In case that formal citizenship rights are not well entrenched, it is civil society that provides the channels through which most people can make their voices heard (Edwards 2004: 15).

3.4 Political Society

In short, civil society is seen as key to the democratisation process in two ways; first, the work within civil society organisations leads to increased participation and civic skills; and second, civil society relates demands and ideas to the larger political context (Choup 2003: 27-28). But if, as some holds, civil society's chief virtue is its ability to act as an organised counterweight to the state, to what extent can this happen without the help of political parties and expressly political movements? (Foley&Edwards: 39). Iris Marion Young distinguishes civil society, in three levels: private association, civic association, and *political* association (Young 2000: 157). But, as Foley and Edwards argue, when is the "civil" really to be distinguished from "political" society? If that is the case, how are political organisations *per se* distinguished from the political activities in groups in civil society, from interest groups to religious bodies, which are intermittently mobilised in pursuit of political goals? Just when does the "civil" become the "political"?" (Foley&Edwards 1996: 38).

The obvious question therefore follows: how are the associative and communicative *practices* of 'civil society' related to the aspirational or juridical *fictions* of 'political society' in new democracies? If there is more than one historical route to the establishment of a civil society, it would seem to follow that there could be more than one way in which civil society is related to the construction of a democratic political regime (Whitehead 1997: 103).

3.5 The Global Sphere

During the same period of time as Putnam (1995) published his article and book, the renewed interest in the concept of civil society gained enormous response in the global community. Within the realm of the "third wave of democratization"

(Huntington 1991) civil society organisations were credited with “effective resistance to authoritarian regimes”, as a means to democratising society from below while pressuring authoritarians for a change (Foley & Edwards 1996: 38). The term was now familiar to politicians, business leaders, academics, as well as foundation executives, relief agencies, citizens, NGOs and political actors of various persuasions (Keane 1998:4, 32).

Göran Hydén says that what we are witnessing today is an attempt to relate civil society to democratic governance in a historically compressed time perspective. External factors obviously play a much greater role in democratisation today than they did when Europe went through this process (Hydén 1995: 6).

In the global context of civil society there are theorists that argue that since civil society so obviously is a product of a specific period in the evolution of the West, it cannot exist, let alone prosper, in non-Western societies (Edwards 2004: 30). For some theorists, “civil society” is only fully present within liberal-democratic societies. The argument being that civil society requires a pluralist political culture which is simply not present in some regions (Baker 2004: 49). For those theorists, civil society is about the sociology of liberal, pluralist polities, rather than that transhistorical political space for democratic action such as the opposition theorists of civil society had in mind (ibid: 50). For Ernest Gellner, John Hall and others, civil society and Islam, for instance, are ‘mutually exclusive alternatives’ because Islam as an institution cannot be left and entered freely (Edwards 2004: 30). Islamic societies are commonly regarded as being weak in fostering a ‘genuine’ civil society. But non-European societies have generally been ‘looked upon’ without any ethnographic particulars. In a global context, it should be noted that even within European societies, the “practices of this intellectual idea take different approaches” (Hann 1996: 2). At large, the associational realm is highly varied in most societies, in practice, it is made up of groups that vary:

[...] between “modern” interest groups such as trade unions or professional associations and “traditional” ascriptive organizations based on kinship, ethnicity, culture or region; between formal organizations and informal social networks based on patrimonial or clientistic allegiances; between those institutions with specifically political roles as pressure or advocacy groups and those whose activities remain largely outside the political system; between legal or open associations and secret and illegal organizations such as the Freemasons, the Mafia or the Triads; between associations which accept the political status quo or those who seek to transform it by changing the political regime (White 2004: 10).

Hann (1996) states that the debate on civil society “hitherto has been too narrowly circumscribed by modern western models of liberal-individualism” and that “the exploration of civil society requires that careful attention be paid to a range of informal interpersonal practices overlooked by other disciplines” (Hann 1996: 3).

3.6 Summary

The utopian ideal is that civil society activists should use to critique existing structures of political manipulation. However, the distinction of civil society and “political” society remains defuse. Civil society is most likely to emerge if the necessary balance between dominant classes and state power maximises political space for it. Civil society is an interdependent third sphere balancing the power between state and demos. Although not all associations in society are civic, society still includes groups that are economic, cultural, informational and educational, interest-based, developmental, issue-oriented and civic as the formal and informal groups civil society encompasses. The social capital generates attitudes and values relating to trust and reciprocity, as being crucial for social and political stability and cooperation. The communication structures of the public sphere, where information circulates freely, provide a basis for collective action.

4 Homegrown

Democracy has achieved remarkable universality in the international system (McFaul 2004: 148). But the spread of democracy around the globe has not passed uncritically. The conceptual issues of democracy, what democracy is, and perhaps more important, what it is not, have consequently undergone thorough examinations during the last decades (see Schmitter & Karl 1993). For almost a century in the West, democracy has meant liberal democracy – a political system “marked not only by free and fair elections, but also by the rule of law, a separation of powers, and the protection of liberties and speech, assembly, religion, and property” (Zakaria 1997: 22). While Schumpeter believed that a competitive electoral system entails a belief in the legitimacy of the system, Dahl, in his turn, argued that it was in the depths of political culture that support for a political system derives (Held 1987: 197). In 1965 Sartori wrote that the existence of democracies depends on the popularisation of the idea of democracy. A clear understanding of what democracy is about, is a significant condition for behaving democratically, as “wrong ideas about democracy make a democracy go wrong” (Sartori 1965: 5).

Thus, defining the concepts of democracy is not an easy target. Nonetheless, as Sundström notes, democracy is “about actors but also about how these actors interact within a structure, and ultimately also about the properties of the structure itself” (Sundström 2001: 116). As Schmitter and Karl (1993) point out, these structures and defining components of democracy are inevitably abstract and may give “rise to a considerable variety of institutions and subtypes of democracy”, as various types of democracy and the specific form it takes, is dependant on the socioeconomic conditions of a country as well as state structures and policy practices (Schmitter & Karl 1993: 44).

Since the dramatic expansion of democracies during the 1980s, the promotion of democracy has increased rapidly. The western donor agencies started out with pro-democratic programmes, at that time particularly relating to elections and human rights. There has been different trends in the strategies of donor agencies’ democracy promotion, which give rise to many questions about the forms and functions of such aid (Carothers 1997: 109).

The last few years, within the donor community and among policy-makers, the word “homegrown” has been employed in discussing developmental issues. Democracy promotion strategies should be rooted in the heart of culture and not imposing an imported system. The former Secretary-General to International IDEA⁶ published an opinion piece in the International Herald

⁶ IDEA is an intergovernmental organization comprised of 24 Member States.

Tribune arguing that any form political modernisation is to take, it must be understood that “there is no single model of democracy valid for all countries and contexts. A healthy democracy is homegrown, not imported” (Save-Söderbergh 2000). Two years later, during a lecture at the UN Headquarters in New York in April 2002, the deputy secretary-general (DPSG) at the time, Louise Fréchette, stated that “development cannot be imposed from outside. Unless there is a homegrown strategy, owned and directed by the country itself, and reflecting the broad needs of society, progress is unlikely” (Fréchette 2002). In 2004, during a raging civil war in Iraq, the former Secretary General Kofi Annan, stressed that “any process, anywhere in the world, must be homegrown, coming from within” (Sahnoun 2004).

And finally, in an article in *Foreign Policy* 2004, King Abdallah II of Jordan noted that successful change “comes from within”, stating that there is not one single-track solution but that “real change is comprehensive change” meaning that change require partnership; government cannot substitute for a healthy private sector on its own, a strong civil society is necessary. But first and foremost, King Abdallah II argued that the process must be “homegrown”.

The question remains, however, what a homegrown strategy means in terms of *democratic* development and consequently what that means in relation to the donor community. As the DPSG noted, “the actions of the donor community have been very fragmented. Each has its own preferred issues and projects, and each has its own accountability requirements. Recipients are pushed and pulled in different directions, and must spend an inordinate amount of time preparing reports to satisfy the auditors of a multitude of partners” (Fréchette 2002).

Are the seeds of liberal democracy likely to spawn the same offspring under all conditions? Probably not. Homegrown as a word, is an adjective; meaning grown or produced in one’s own garden or country; belonging to one’s own particular locality or country (Oxford Thesaurus). Keeping in mind the words of Dahl, that it is in the depths of political culture that support for a political system derives, is the donor community willing to support of system deriving from an, let us say, Islamic heritage? Could the international assistance programmes incorporate an understanding of variations in regional conditions into their designs of their strategies, if, let us say, a political system rooted in culture favoured its tribal communities? But more importantly perhaps, what *are* the local preconditions? The attempts for indigenous strategies have emerged in factual developmental contexts. Perhaps western liberal democracy will prove not to be the final destination on the democratic road, but just one of many possible exits (Zakaria 1997: 2).

5 TWO CASES

In *Promoting Polyarchy* sociologist William I Robinson noted that our everyday experiences are played out in certain, different, milieus. These milieus are linked to institutions that organise our lives and bind us to other people. Varied and encompassing combinations of institutions and their interrelations form a social structure. History, or how social structures have changed over time, tells us where we came from, how we have arrived, at the present, and where we are headed (1996: 13).

It is these structures that the 1980s and 1990s political aid has sought to influence through its relations with the third world. More commonly known as 'democracy assistance', political aid is targeted at governmental structures such as parliament, the judiciary and local government, as well as civil society organisations, with the aim of strengthening the institutions and culture of liberal democracy (Hearn 2000).

5.1 Top-Down Strategies

Through a set of election observations, Staffan I. Lindberg (2004) provided evidence of that elections have a causal impact on improving the qualities of democracy in newly democratised countries. Lindberg focused exclusively on three dimensions of elections: participation, competition, and legitimacy through which he created a hybrid measure of democracy (Landman 2007: 7). He found that the electoral cycle of multiparty elections was a “virtuous spiral of self-reinforcing power” leading to increasingly democratic elections (Lindberg 2004: 110). The empirical tests on repetitive uninterrupted elections revealed a tendency to be associated with an increase in real civil liberties in society (ibid: 150-170). However, within the *promotion* of democracy, in only liberalised autocracies, development assistance through the state has frequently squandered as it made its way through inefficient bureaucracies riddled with corruption and nepotistic practices designed to bolster neo-patrimonial networks rather than foster development (Wiktorowicz 1997: 79), which Fareed Zakaria refers to as the ‘illiberal democracy’ (Zakaria).

Nevertheless, the main emphasis of promoting from a top-down strategy is holding elections – presidential, parliamentary, and local – with the ambition of being free and fair. That kind of aid normally consists of technical assistance to electoral commissions, support for voter education campaigns implemented by local civic groups, and election monitoring by international delegations of domestic organisations formed for that purpose. Furthermore, a related area to electoral assistance is the development of political parties. The aim is to develop a party system “marked by a limited number of national political parties differentiated by “mild ideological

shadings”, with genuine national institutional reach, and strong campaign capacities”. Such programmes are designed to strengthen the main political parties, primarily through technical assistance and training on campaigning methods and institutional development (Carothers 1997: 112-113).

5.2 Bottom-Up Strategies

Within donor-strategies, there is a belief that it is valuable and important for democracy promoters to work from the bottom-up rather than the top-down in developing transitional societies (Carothers&Ottaway 2000: 4). Bolstered by outside assistance, donors envision that virtuous civil societies of democratic-minded, non-partisan, peaceful citizens would erode authoritarian regimes (Hawthorn 2005: 97). However, most donor countries end up concentrating on a very narrow set of organisations such as professionalised NGOs dedicated to advocacy or civic education, i.e. organisations set up along the lines of advocacy NGOs in established democracies, with designated management, full-time staff, an office, and a charter or statement of mission (Carothers&Ottaway 2000: 11).

Foreign democracy promoters put their faith in a “non-political”, technical, incremental path to democracy, shying away from the idea that democracy is achieved through a pact, revolution. In the Western-liberal view, democracy is the natural endpoint of a line of social and political development that donors can speed up even when all socioeconomic prerequisites have not been met. Donors stay away from political forms of democracy promotion, yet assisting actors and organisations that work openly and directly for political democratisation (Brouwer 2000: 32). Broad citizen participation beyond the vote is a necessity. Innumerable projects target the strengthening of civil society, but defined by donors, they favour professional advocacy NGOs, which speak the language of democracy and easily relate to the international community (Ottaway 2003: 13).

5.3 Jordan

Following the defeat of the Ottoman Empire in World War I, the future Jordan was carved out of the Balqa district of the Ottoman province of Syria and placed under protective treaty. As former British Mandate territory, The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan⁷ gained its independency through its foundation 1946 (Davies 1997: 67).

⁷ Within the framework of this essay, it is impossible to give a thorough, it is not an essay about Jotdan itself, but merely uses the structure of the jordanian society to illustrate the point of this essay.

When the first Palestinian *intifada* (uprising) raged just across the Jordan River in the West Bank 1989, Jordan's King Hussein (1953-1999) took steps toward political opening, ending repression, and calling new elections to replace the National Assembly that he had dissolved in 1988. The king forged a national pact that put Jordan at the forefront of liberalisation in the Arab world (Lucas 2003: 137).

5.3.1 Electoral Campaigning in the Hashemite Kingdom

The generally free election to the Chamber of Deputies (The National Assembly consists of the Assembly of Senators and the Chamber of Deputies) in November 1993, tribes/clans, Islamists, leftist/nationalist parties, Arab nationalists and centrist or Jordanian nationalists competed for 80 seats (Amawi 1994: 1).

The Political Parties Law of 1992 allowed parties to petition for legal status for the first time in three decades. The Press and Publication Law of December 1992, gave hope for a fair political campaigning among the listed parties (Amawi 1994: 3). Nonetheless, despite the new law, the government imposed numerous regulations governing the election campaign. Public political meetings staged by candidates were banned, confining candidates to their private homes and campaign offices for publicising their views and interacting with the public. Eventually the ban was overturned – one week before election day. The government also banned civil servants from actively engaging in the election campaign, including writing editorials in the newspapers (ibid: 4). By the late 1990s, the regime had promulgated a series of new and more repressive laws on press and publications in a clear attempt to rein in a media that the regime felt had “overstepped its bounds” (ibid: 3). The process of de-liberalisation continued even after the succession in the monarchy itself, from the long-serving King Hussein (1953-1999) to his eldest son, King Abdullah II.

5.3.2 Political Culture

The new King quickly reaffirmed Jordan's peace treaty with Israel as well as its relations with the United States. Two years after his succession, Abdullah dissolved the parliament, replaced elected public councils with state-appointed local committees, and ruled by decree through the office of the prime minister. Under the new king, the regime passed some 250 emergency laws, more than it had from independence in 1946 until 2001. Those laws weakened the process of protections and imposed new restrictions on freedom of expression and assembly (Ryan&Schwedler 2003: 139). Since the new Political Parties Law was issued in 1992, parties have participated as such in three parliamentary elections since then (1993, 1997, 2003⁸). But they have not been able to play their role in democratic transformation and political participation (Majed 2005: 17). In the prevailing political culture, the executive authorities are hostile to political parties, and the Political Parties Law fails to stipulate the rights of parties. Majed notes

⁸ The elections scheduled for November 2001 were repeatedly postponed but was finally held in 2003 (Ryan&Schwedler 2003: 139).

that the parties do not practice democracy internally within the party structure themselves, which casts some doubts on their commitment to the democratisation process (ibid: 17). However, Islamist groups already engaging in pluralist politics provide sufficient evidence that there is no *necessary* incompatibility between democracy and Islam. And while not all Islamist groups will be equally supportive of democratic and pluralist reforms, the main obstacle to continued progress toward democratisation turns out to be the regime itself (Ryan&Schwedler 2003: 140).

As for the opposition, most groups, such as the Muslim Brotherhood, are explicitly loyal having “mutual understanding regarding regime loyalty and policy opposition”. Under the 1991 National Charter, political pluralism and participation is limited and within the context of loyalty to the Hashemite monarchy (Ryan&Schwedler 2003: 144).

The freedom of the press, media and the freedom of expression has suffered under the laws and by the climate of ‘constrained democracy’. With the exception of a few opposition papers (independent and party-affiliated) which have very small circulations, the government media dominate the Jordanian media scene to a very great extent. Radio, television and the official Petra news agency are all under direct government supervision (Sweiss 2005: 120).

5.3.3 Civil Society

The Jordanian regime utilises myriad strategies and mechanisms designed to foster the growth of NGOs without promoting independent centres of power capable of influencing public policy of the public sphere (Wiktorowicz 2001: 78). Freedomhouse reports that freedom of assembly and association is heavily restricted. Despite NGOs’ limitation in directly addressing political issues, they have yet influenced politics. By shifting discourse and symbolic meaning on sensitive topics, they have helped build a discourse that encourage people to change their behaviour, and views toward governance. Human Rights groups, women’s unions and Islamic NGOs are all such groups (ibid: 78). Alas, in several instances, the government has cracked down on such NGOs when they seem to threaten regime interests or cross the line into oppositional politics. But through the informal structures of society, these groups still have a political influence human rights discourse that regimes are forced to recognise and address (ibid: 78, 83). Local journalists are closely watched by the country’s intelligence services and have to be members of the state-run Jordan Press Association. The king often says he favours decriminalisation of press offences, but journalists still face prison if they write things considered “harmful to the country’s diplomatic relations” or to do with the king and the royal family. Self-censorship is common (Reporters sans frontières: Annual Report 2007).

5.3.4 Donors’ Efforts

Jordan receives important developmental assistance from a wide variety of donors. The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) is one

of them. According to their own figures, they are the largest donor in Jordan. In broad terms, Jordan's total commitments of foreign assistance in 2003, exceeded to approximately \$ 1,5 billion, representing a 170% increase over 2002. The United States is by far the largest granter, providing 78% of the total, followed by Japan at 8%, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and Abu Dhabi at 8%, and the European Union at 2.8%, Canada, Germany, Spain, Italy, United Kingdom, Norway, Sweden, and the World Bank each provided less than 0,4%. An important amount of the aid involves technical assistance for preparation for Jordan's parliamentary elections (USAID1).

International IDEA is another donor agency that promotes elections as a democratic force and political parties as its vehicle. Among various things, International IDEA offers expertise on the electoral processes by "supporting the development of credible and efficient electoral processes" and "assisting in building public confidence by promoting the professional management of elections and referendums". The Institute supports political parties as (IDEA Annual Report 2006: 4-5), political parties are crucial to aggregating interests, presenting political alternatives and forming a link between the voters and those elected. Competition between parties can promote better policies and more accountable governance (IDEA Annual Report 2006: 10-11). Together with a Jordanian NGO, they held a 10-day course in November 2006, training elections administrators from Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Palestine, Somalia, Sudan and Syria (IDEA Annual Report 2006: 19).

On the promotion of a free media, the USAID budget for 2006, \$ 500 000 was put aside for "Establish and ensure media freedom and freedom of information through policy reform, limited journalist training, and privatisation of publish sector media outlets" (USAID2). Following a country-strategy paper 2002-2006, the European Union granted € 2 million launching a programme formulating the basis for a broader support promoting the freedom of media, association and assembly (EU Report: 39).

Jordan's political change in form of transition has been described as a "survival strategy" of a regime dependent upon external revenues. Jordan relies extensively upon exogenous sources of revenues, such as foreign assistance and workers' remittance (Wiktorowicz 2001: 82). Scott Greenwood argues that the regime manipulates the election laws while pursuing economic liberalisation, in order to maintain the external funding on which the kingdom is dependent (Greenwood in Ryan&Schwedler 2003: 145). The electoral system is heavily skewed toward the monarchy's traditional support base, favouring tribal and family ties over political and ideological affiliations. The elections are not meant to effect real political change, ensuring the selection of parliament which, with limited powers, has no real influence on major issues (Ryan&Schwedler 2004: 149, Amawi 1994: 11-12).

5.4 Kyrgyzstan

Inhabited by nomadic herds and ruled by tribal leaders for centuries, Kyrgyzstan was conquered by Russia in the mid-1800. It fell under Soviet rule 1924, but acquired its independency in August 1991 as a result of the collapse of the Soviet Union (Anderson 1999: 1-23). In the early 1990s, the new republic was seen as an 'island of democracy' with a realm of flourishing social organisations (Anderson 2000: 78, Khamidov 2006: 87). Kyrgyzstan quickly gained recognition in the West (Adamson 2002: 184). Askar Akayev, at that time a chairman of the republican academy of sciences (Anderson 1999: 20), ran unopposed and was elected president of the new republic by direct ballot receiving 95% of the votes cast (Freedomhouse1).

5.4.1 Building a civil realm

Akayev stressed the importance of an open but constructive media operating within the confines of the rule of law. And although he made frequent references to the need to creating a broad range of civil society organisations which would bolster both democratisation and marketisation, Kyrgyzstan had a turbulent start with amendments in the constitution, postponed elections, and dissolved parliament (Andersson 1999: 29). It was a country that lacked any experience of self-government let alone liberal democratic politics. Despite the facts that this was a country where more 'modern' forms of self-organisation had not developed before 1989, new social organisations sprang up in most of the largest cities (Anderson 1999: 23, 2000: 78, 79). In the early to mid-1990s many Kyrgyz civil society organisations were criticised for functioning as family networks. Another point of criticism was that financial aspects of gathering support from Westerner donors often outstripped the "genuine" civic initiative. (Marat 2005: 268). The development of both civil society and democratisation proceeded in parallel rather than linear fashion, with the fate of civil society as much dependent on the activities and actions of political elites as its own self-organisational capacities (Anderson 2000: 79-80). The essentially Western construct of civil society associations developed in a society where the primary ties were rooted in collective links to kin and region, rather than based upon common participation as individuals in social organisations (ibid: 29).

5.4.2 Elections and political culture

By 1994, however, there were signs that Akayev had lost some of his initial enthusiasm for democracy, or at least the slavish attempt to follow Western political model, and the pluralist politics turned into a fuzzy path. Addressing a constitutional convention in December 1994, the president appeared to step back from his earlier belief in the simultaneous development of political, economic,

and social reform. Several critical journalists were subjected to criminal prosecution (Anderson 2000: 79-80). And even though there was no formal censorship, television and radio companies remained largely under state control. Many newspapers acted as the voice of governmental or state agencies and inevitably were expected to follow their line. Despite a considerable degree of press freedom, early on there were signs that the political elite was not entirely comfortable with free wheeling media (ibid: 86).

Parliamentary elections in February 1995 were characterised by considerable manipulation in much of the country, albeit as much by local networks as the central authorities (Anderson 2000: 80). The 1995 parliamentary election was entitled as “fraud, corruption, and public anomie reigned” (Adamson 2002: 184). From the mid-1990s, The Organization for Security and Co-Operation in Europe (OSCE) got actively involved in monitoring and assessing the validity of the Kyrgyz elections. Most of the OSCE’s critical evaluation was ignored. In October 2000 Akayev gained 74% of the vote. The international community questioned the validity of the vote and the OSCE’s disapproved of the elections. Even so, the referendum in February 2003 considerably increased the president’s power. While international organisations expanded in the country, largely corrupt methods were applied in politics, something that continued until the parliamentary elections in February-March 2005 (Marat 2005: 272).

5.4.3 Revolution

Independent media outlets were hounded in the run-up to parliamentary elections on 27 February 2005, fearing a general uprising as thousands of demonstrators protested against the exclusion of some opposition candidates. But the opposition’s rise to prominence accelerated, surging a wave of public protests over the fraudulent parliamentary elections on February 27. On March 24 2005, the mobilised protesters and oppositional supporters stormed the presidential headquarters in Bishkek; the “Tulip Revolution” overthrew President Askar Akayev on 24 March after 14 years in power (Khamidov 2006: 87). However, regarding the revolution, it was the *informal youth groups* with ties to influential political and business elites that played the decisive role in bringing it about. Because of disunity among the opposition groups and formal institutions, influential political leaders and business elites chose to work with, and channel resources for protests through, their informal patronage and local networks rather than through formal organisations. Unlike the professional associations, informal youth groups had maintained close ties with individual opposition leaders and businesspeople. The informal groups are described as self-helping associations of peers, attached with the local elites attending various traditional events including weddings and mourning ceremonies. And although these groups do not have a formal set of rules and structures, they nevertheless have an informal hierarchy with chosen leaders and membership rules (ibid: 86-90).

5.4.4 Donor's Efforts

In 1998 alone, the USAID spent more than \$11 million on democratic transition programmes in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan respectively. Most of the money finances strategies and programmes are designed to strengthen civil society, particularly the creation of an independent third sector in the region, composed of local advocacy NGOs such as professional organisations, women's organisations, and environmental groups (Adamson 2002: 177). From 2003 until 2006, the USAID spent approximately \$ 36 million in providing technical assistance to a range of political parties on platform development, constituent outreach, internal governance, and sustainability between elections. To do that, USAID would provide ink and ultraviolet lights to the Central Election Commission. Primary recipients were to be the International Republican Institute, National Democratic Institute, and the International Foundation for Election Systems (USAID: 3).

In 2006, USAID designed to strengthen civil society by building the institutional capacity of a local Association of Civil Society Resource Centers (CSSCs), targeting professional associations and democracy non-governmental organizations (NGOs), with possible additional support for elections-related outreach. The civic education textbook will be introduced to 62,000 new students, with 500 new students participating in extra-curricular activities.

USAID also aimed to establish and Ensure Media Freedom and Freedom of Information (\$679,000 FSA, \$109,000 FSA carryover). USAID would provide media with production grants, programming, and business training, and promote a supportive enabling environment. Freedom of speech advocacy will continue. Principal contractors/grantees various journalists and news networks (USAID: 3). For 2007, USAID has budgeted \$ 24 million in assistance programmes for the Kyrgyz republic (USAID: 4).

Kyrgyzstan is rural as a country and most of the protestors in Bishbek were not city dwellers but countryfolk. Furthermore, the Kyrgyz opposition consisted not of established parties or civil society groups, but elites lacking broad-based support that had banded together for tactical reasons. This meant that a formal youth organisations, had little chance of tapping into resources and support of the opposition alliance (Khamidov 2006: 91). Local elites with backing from informal grassroots organisations and rural dwellers made Kyrgyzstan's own path. Formal organisations such as political parties, civil society, and youth organisations have remained largely on the sidelines of the political upheaval. Unfortunately, the revolution never overthrew the regime, it merely transferred possession of power (Khamidov 2006: 92), with old patterns reproducing themselves hindering efforts at real reform on major issues such as corruption and equitable distribution of resources (Radnitz 2006: 132-133).

Ironically, the parliamentary elections that ultimately led to Akayev's downfall were probably the freest and fairest that Central Asia has yet seen. Of all grievances that spurred opposition to Akayev, the most salient was anger at corruption. When Bakiyev took over, he pledged to make the fight against it a priority, but in October 2005, as mob scenes and violence proliferated, Bakiyev endorsed a law prohibiting public demonstrations – the very means that brought

him to power – for one year. Self-censorship is still common and criticism of the president rare. The new government is trying to regain control of privately-owned TV stations by purchasing shares in them through private investors (Radnitz 2006: 134-143, *Reporters sans frontières: Annual Report 2006*).

Democracy assistance programmes also provide computers, Internet access, and other infrastructural improvements and sponsor education, training, and exchange programmes that are producing a new Westernised elite. Despite quite a few “success-stories”, the assistance programmes have however not been successful in effecting large-scale structural change in the region or strengthening grassroots democracy beyond individual local success. Despite attempts by international actors to strengthening civil society in Kyrgyzstan by supporting the third sphere and independent civic advocacy groups, popular opposition to authoritarian regimes in the region of Central Asia comes not from a vibrant Western-style NGO sector but from religious movements or ethnic mobilisation. Islamist movements in particular have gained strength as expressions of popular opposition to existing regimes, and Central Asian state elites view these movements as posing threat to existing power configuration in the region (Adamson 2002: 178).

6 Discussion

The launching of hundreds of projects have been marked by enthusiasm within international actors involved in democracy aid. Among the enthusiasts we find bilateral aid agencies, international institutions, and private foundations (Ottaway&Carrothers 2000: 293). But in carefully controlled political environments, how could democracy assistance possibly be brought about? The centre of this study was international democracy assistance in relation to politically restricted settings. To go back to the inquiry in question:

Homegrown organisations with no form of political governing from an aid agency will be better than organisations with any form of political governing to implement the democratic criteria to generate and spread alternative information

The principal argument in this thesis was that generating and spreading alternative sources of information facilitates a basis for action. The freedom to associate with others should ensure that possibility. With the access to alternative information, the citizen ought to participate in collective rationale debate, in order to develop independent arguments. The social structures of civil society would provide such access as the function of social capital is the potential for information that inheres in social relations. The more empirical approach was that local, homegrown, organisations without political pressure would be better than donors' democracy strategies to generate and spreading alternative information.

The call for change in design strategy, an approach to "homegrown" strategies has likewise proved itself easier said than done. Although this study did not provide a thorough examination of various donor agencies, merely a brief description of their proposed plans, in the context of the two cases, some elements of a social phenomena could be made visible. I base my conclusion on following findings.

In the case of Jordan, an ally to the U.S., heavily dependent on foreign financial support, one would think some possible change was achievable in the political institutions as well as providing some basis for political activism. But not so much. The top-down strategy, supporting voter education campaigns implemented by local civic groups and elections with strong campaign capacity, seems inefficient in spreading information when political parties do not have a fair chance affecting the decision-making process. The money from the international donor agencies will not do much democratic good unless the kingdom facilitates real elections with real political influence. The "virtuous spiral of self-reinforcing power" (Lindberg 2004) of elections and its causal impact on improving the qualities of participation, competition, and legitimacy cannot stand for a country still in progress, the institutions still closing its eye on democratic transformation.

In these cases of top-down strategies, on the institutional level, it will probably more likely manifest the “illiberal democracy” (Zakaria 1997). If it is difficult to enhance real political change via party training, I would have thought that the structures of civil society would have it easier in facilitating information for action. However, it seems like even though local organisations are limited, the donors may help providing space for interaction by facilitating means for social activists to spread their information. In a hostile political environment, information must inevitably inhere in the informal structures of society. Through a top-down strategy however, to the donors, a “homegrown” approach would mean implementing a strategy manifested in what King Abdullah II referred to as the humanistic traditions of Islam and developments directed from within, rooted in the Arab-Islamic heritage yet open to global ideas and partners (2004). Considering the discussions on democracy and Islam, the western donor communities faces challenges.

In Kyrgyzstan, a Muslim non-Arab environment, the bottom-up strategies have provided a mix of democratic change. In Kyrgyzstan, it was not the bottom-up strategy via professional, westernised elite that spread information that mobilised the opposition into action. It was the informal structures of the political youth, rooted in Kyrgyz local patronage. It was the homegrown groups, without any grants from the international community that facilitated the basis for action. The outside assistance, did not bolster this kind of opposition. The donor vision that virtuous civil societies of democratic-minded, non-partisan, peaceful citizens will erode authoritarian regimes, almost did happen. It was just that they were the un-funded.

A homegrown democratic strategy may impose different ideas among the variety of members in developing societies. In a political context, the general good, to act in the interest of the collectivity, may take a myriad of approaches. But surely, successful change comes from within. Whether it will be in western liberal form or not.

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