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# Civil Society and Civil War Onset: What is the Relationship?

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CISSM Working Paper  
December 2018

This paper was made possible with support from the Yamamoto-Scheffelin Endowment for Policy Research.

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## **Abstract**

U.S. foreign policy increasingly embraces and seeks to empower civil society organizations in developing countries as a critical contributor to stability and security. This paper explores whether there are grounds for these claims, specifically whether variation in civil society can explain the onset of civil wars. It examines two common explanations for the conflict-preventative potential of civil society, namely its ability to increase social capital and citizens' voice. Four hypotheses are tested by integrating new data on various attributes of civil society from the Varieties of Democracies Initiative into a common model of civil war onset. Little support is found for claims that civil society reduces the probability of civil war onset by improving social capital, but onset may be reduced when a strong advocacy and political orientation is present in civil society. In other words, there appears to be some grounds for U.S. policy claims that a stronger civil society can enhance citizens' voice and reduce instability and conflict onset. This finding still raises many questions about the precise links between civil society and civil war onset, and introduces potential complications for how policymakers might address conflict onset through support for civil society.

Does variation in the strength of civil society influence the onset of civil wars? How does civil society affect the incentives and opportunities to mount an armed rebellion against the state? Are there specific attributes of civil society that are associated with the onset of civil conflict?

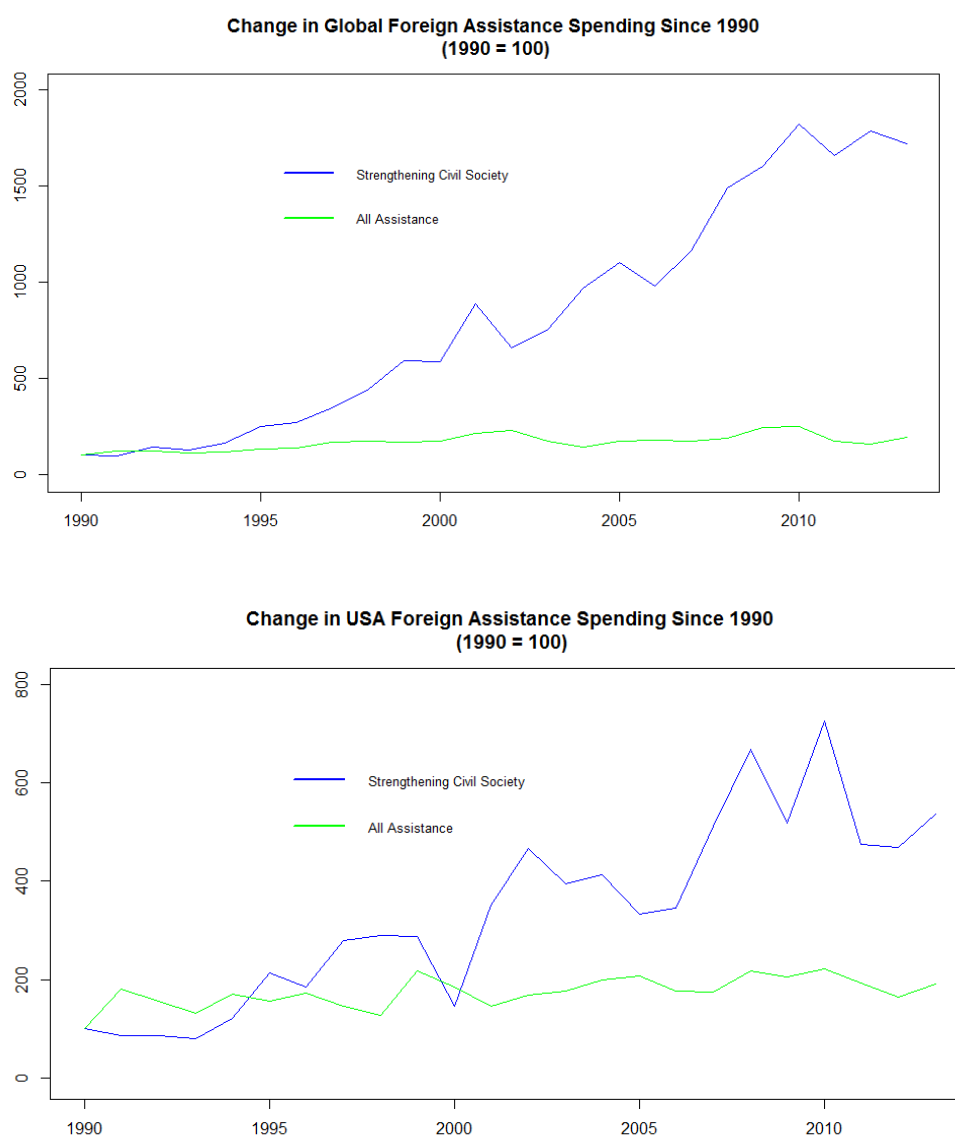
Civil society is generally conceived of as comprising all voluntary organizations and associations that exist within society outside of the household and independent of the state. This includes labor unions and professional associations, faith-based and religious organizations, nongovernmental organizations, student groups, advocacy and special interest organizations, and a wide variety of recreational, social, cultural, and other entities founded and maintained voluntarily by citizens. When strong and vibrant, such civil society is believed to provide several benefits, including higher levels of social capital as well as stronger abilities to influence government and policy. For these reasons, a strong civil society may mitigate grievances or allow them to be addressed more constructively and cost effectively than through armed rebellion.

Some of these benefits have been observed on the ground in a range of developing countries. Civil society organizations have been critical in lobbying governments to establish national human rights institutions and support their autonomy in monitoring government performance in Malaysia, Nepal, the Philippines, and elsewhere (Renshaw, 2012). The quality of the content and implementation of access to information laws in Mexico, South Africa, Bulgaria, and many other countries across Latin America and Eastern Europe have been attributed to the strength and assertiveness of civil society organizations (Ackerman & ISandoval-Ballesteros, 2006; Puddephatt, 2009). The vibrancy of associational life in Indian cities has also been linked to higher trust, cooperation, and dispute management within mixed Muslim and Hindu municipalities (Varshney, 2001a) as well as social conformity and cooperation more generally (Thyne & Schroeder, 2012). The involvement of civil society representatives in peace negotiations and the implementation of settlements has been found to reduce the recurrence of civil war (Kew & Wanis-St. John, 2008; Nilsson, 2012). Taken together, this positive influence and these benefits of civil society organizations may explain why countries like Zambia, Tanzania, Malawi, or Chile have avoided civil wars despite having experienced many other common predictors of conflict onset such as high poverty, severe financial crises, weak development, and weak governing structures.

Understanding the relationship between civil society and civil war onset is important for two reasons. First, previous research has analyzed how variation in civil society might affect different aspects of civil war and political violence, but few have specifically analyzed its relationship with civil war onset. Rather, the focus of existing literature has been on the role of civil society in conflict intensity, termination, and recurrence. Second, over the last two decades U.S. foreign policy has operated on the assumption that strengthening civil society in developing countries increases political stability and reduces the likelihood of conflict onset. This is apparent most recently in the launch of President Barack Obama's Stand with Civil Society Initiative in 2013, which channeled billions of dollars to civil society groups in countries around the world (CRS, 2016). The Stand initiative echoed the views and modus operandi of previous U.S. presidential administrations, including the National Security Presidential Directive-88 signed by Obama's predecessor, President George W. Bush (Gilley, 2013; The White House, 2008). Support for civil society has grown accordingly, with changes in annual assistance for civil society far outpacing

overall foreign assistance spending in the United States and globally (see Figure 1). In analyses from Washington think tanks of crises and conflicts as well as security and development more generally, recommendations to strengthen civil society have become so common that one detractor has termed such praise the “cult of civil society” (Mead, 2012).

**Figure 1. Annual Rates of Change in Spending on Civil Society, 1990-2013**



Source: Aid Data 3.0. “Strengthening Civil Society” assistance is identified by aggregating annual spending using OECD CRS code 15150.

This extensive faith in the benefits of civil society and its potential to prevent conflict is worthy of further investigation, which this paper seeks to explore. The paper unfolds in four parts. First, I examine definitions of civil society and the general benefits it yields. The concept of civil society is then integrated into common theories of civil war onset. Four hypotheses about the impact of variation in civil society on civil war onset are then offered. Third, the data and methods for testing these hypotheses are described, and, lastly, quantitative modeling results will be reviewed. A conclusion briefly reviews the implications of the finding for policies toward conflict prevention and civil society support.

The results indicate some support for prevailing policy justifications for efforts to strengthen civil society, but they also conflict with common expectations regarding how civil society might lower incidence of civil war, specifically the supposed conflict inhibiting potential of higher levels of social capital. However, the presence of more politically active advocacy and interest groups – especially anti-status quo civil society organizations that rely on legal means – is associated with lower probabilities of onset of civil war. While this does reinforce some of the rationale behind a policy of supporting civil society, these findings do raise questions about the direct and independent effects of civil society on civil war onset. More nuanced analysis may better reveal the precise processes and dynamics that link attributes and types of civil society to the likelihood of conflict onset. Policymakers will also confront other normative quandaries when considering support for anti-status quo activists when considering how to support civil society to forestall civil war.

## Civil Society and Its Benefits

The starting point for many contemporary analyses of civil society is Robert Putnam's *Making Democracy Work* (1994), his multi-decade research effort to determine the source of significant differences in the quality of life and performance of governing institutions across Italy. Putnam found that stronger “civic communities” best explained regional differences. Such civic strength was measured by the number of and extent of participation in citizen groups and associations, such as recreational, cultural, social, professional, labor, and political entities, among others, that are founded and collectively maintained through voluntary engagement by their members.<sup>1</sup> The regions of Italy with higher numbers of such groups and higher rates of participation in them tended to be better off economically and experience higher levels of political participation.

This depiction of civil society as a space populated by “all associations and networks between the family and the state in which membership and activities are ‘voluntary’” is among “the most common of the understandings in use today” (M. Edwards, 2009, p. 20). It is also consistent with the definitions used by many others, including those that explore the relationship between civil society and civil conflict intensity and resolution (Nilsson, 2012; Varshney, 2001a; Weinstein, 2007) as well as attempts to measure civil society cross nationally (Bernhard, Jung, Tzelgov, Coppedge, & Lindberg, 2017). Furthermore, it echoes references made in U.S. policy documentation from the *Stand with Civil Society Initiative* and NSPD-88, both of which mention these same types of organizations and associations.

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<sup>1</sup> Putnam identifies four components of civic communities, but his empirical analysis emphasizes the number of and participation in citizen associations and organizations.

Civil society organizations produce multiple benefits that fall under two broad categories: 1) social capital and 2) citizen voice and accountability. Putnam and others emphasize the benefits of social capital. Like other forms of capital, social capital is a resource that can enhance productivity and decision-making. It refers to the concrete social relations that individuals can draw on for information, knowledge, opportunities, and support in ways that affect their political, economic, or other behaviors (Coleman, 1988). For Putnam and many others, key specific benefits of social capital, and by extension civil society, are greater amounts of inter-personal trust, cooperation, and norms of reciprocity. All of these benefits also reduce collective action problems and opportunism. By doing so, many broadly shared economic and political benefits are thought to accrue when participation in a vibrant civil society is high.

Other depictions of the benefits of civil society emphasize its ability to increase the ways in which citizens can hold government to account and/or influence government policies and decisionmaking (Amenta, Caren, Chiarello, & Su, 2010; Andrews, 2012; Boix & Posner, 1998; Htun & Weldon, 2012; Jottier & Heyndels, 2012; Migdal, 2001; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). Benefits of interpersonal trust, cooperation, and norms of reciprocity are less important than the ability of an interconnected and well-organized citizenry to advance a political or economic agenda and convince or compel state officials and institutions to accommodate reforms. This ability to amplify the voice of citizens and hold governments to account was a key point of emphasis for the *Stand with Civil Society* initiative launched during President Barak Obama's administration (White House, 2014).

Such accommodation or the fulfillment of citizen preferences manifest in several ways. First, a stronger civil society may produce a more informed and independent-minded citizenry that actively participates in elections and public forums with the government, generating more responsiveness from state institutions and officials (Booth & Richard, 1998). A stronger civil society may also feature higher numbers of advocacy and special interest organizations lobbying the government to be more transparent and accountable (Htun & Weldon, 2012; Zyl, 2014). For example, a systematic review of studies of the political impact of activist and social movement organizations<sup>2</sup> determined that 84 percent found a positive association with reform across a variety of issue areas, including labor, environmental, and social policies, among others (Amenta et al., 2010). Similar forms of policy advocacy and lobbying may occur even in authoritarian states like China, where extensive participation in associational life and assertive civil society organizations have been linked to accommodative service delivery and responsive public policy decisionmaking (Teets, 2017; Tsai, 2007). Second, a stronger civil society may be able to use more coercive means to compel state accommodation through large-scale nonviolent action and mass protests (Almeida, 2003; Boulding, 2014; Chenoweth & Ulfelder, 2015; Sharp, Paulson, Miller, & Merriman, 2005; Way, 2014; White, Vidovic, González, Gleditsch, & Cunningham, 2015). By lowering the cost of mobilizing and coordinating larger numbers of persons, civil society can make such nonviolent campaigns more feasible and effective. In multiple ways, then,

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<sup>2</sup> While social movements are most often associated with some form of active contention (Tarrow, 2011), Amenta et al. use a more inclusive definition that incorporates aspects of civil society: "We include all the political collective action of movements: not only extrainstitutional action such as protest marches and civil disobedience, but also lobbying, lawsuits, and press conferences." (Amenta et al., 2010, 288).

civil society serves to amplify citizens' voice and advance preferred political and economic agenda.

It should be noted that nothing within common definitions of civil society explicitly excludes the potential for civil society organizations and associations to adopt violence. An organization independent of the state and created and maintained voluntarily by its members is actually not a bad description of an armed insurgent group. Indeed, some studies find that aspects of pre-conflict civil society allow armed insurgents to resolve recruitment, principal-agent, and resource mobilization challenges (Staniland, 2014; Weinstein, 2007). However, in policy circles and some academic analyses, a normative preference for nonviolence is often unconsciously snuck into the conception of civil society (Chambers & Kopstein, 2001; Ottaway & Carothers, 2000; Stacey & Meyer, 2005). Other normative predispositions are also observable in how the U.S. and other governments extend support to civil society. For instance, faith-based organizations have been a preferred recipient of civil society support under both the Obama and Bush administrations, but primarily Christian groups – even in Muslim majority countries like Afghanistan, Iraq, and Pakistan (Marsden, 2012). The U.S. public has heavily favored such preferences, with a majority opposed to providing any funding to mosques and Muslim faith-based organizations. Such practices may have obvious negative effects in states where divides or grievances follow religious cleavages.

Any normative preferences for nonviolence are excluded in the conception of civil society at work in this analysis, as it would render examination of the relationship between civil society and civil war onset moot. Instead, here it is accepted that civil society organizations are not innately averse to the use of armed rebellion as a means to challenge specific policies or the political status quo – as has been observed in Algeria (Braithwaite & Cunningham, 2016), Ukraine (Zhukov, 2016), Uruguay (Brum, 2014), or Colombia (Daly, 2012) where religious groups, labor unions, and activist networks have formed or joined armed insurgencies. Rather, civil society is primarily understood as citizen organizations founded and maintained voluntarily. It is expected that various strengths and attributes of such civil society lowers the appeal or requirement of armed insurgency as a means of advancing anti-status quo reforms, thereby reducing the likelihood of civil war onset.

## **Civil Society and Theories of Civil War Onset: Four Hypotheses**

Explanations of civil war typically focus on factors that influence the incentives or opportunities to engage in armed rebellion to challenge the prevailing political or territorial status quo in a state. While various analyses may emphasize the former over the latter (or vice versa), both incentives and opportunities are necessary for a rebellion to occur. Civil society may affect both of these considerations, and thereby explain civil war onset in ways that are sometimes overlooked by current explanations.

Incentive-based theories of civil war onset focus on grievances. Grievances are any significant divergence between individuals' expectations and their capabilities.<sup>3</sup> Such relative deprivation (Gurr, 1970) is often manifested in political or economic circumstances. This includes forms of exclusion from state offices or political representation or high levels of inequality (Gurr, 1993, 2000; Gurr & Scarritt, 1989; P. M. Regan & Norton, 2005). Others have emphasized how exclusion of politically active ethnic groups from positions of official authority and legislative institutions increases the likelihood of armed rebellion (Cederman, Wimmer, & Min, 2010). Across each of these explanations, rebellion is catalyzed when actors are dissatisfied with their political or economic circumstances or feel that they are excluded from the state and political or economic decision-making therein.

Such explanations of civil war largely overlook how civil society might influence discontent and overall grievances. For instance, feelings of dissatisfaction due to poverty or inequality may be compensated by a sense of fulfillment and achievement that volunteering and associational life have been shown to generate. Cross-national surveys have found that self-reported volunteering is associated with higher levels of general satisfaction, even while controlling for differences in economic prosperity and performance across countries (Wallace & Pichler, 2009). Higher levels of associational life may also increase inter-group information sharing and conflict mitigation capabilities, even within ethnically divided contexts featuring horizontal inequalities or cleavages. For example, the existence of civil society organizations with diverse membership in Indian cities has been associated with lower levels of inter-communal violence between co-located Hindu and Muslim populations (Varshney, 2001b).

Sentiments of exclusion or horizontal inequalities may be mitigated as a result. Several studies of individual attitudes and preferences further demonstrate how associational life might reduce inclinations toward political violence. Surveys of individuals in African countries have demonstrated that some (but not all) types of self-reported associational participation correlate with lower support for political violence (Bhavnani & Backer, 2007), though potentially this may be due to an endogenous selection effect (Chapman, 2008). In Somaliland, experimental research indicates that engagement in civic activities such as working jointly through civic associations to conduct district-wide sanitation campaigns or informational outreach to discourage illegal immigration reduces support for political violence. The measured effect of such civic activism on support for political violence is actually stronger than other experiments that featured the provision of secondary education to Somali youths (Tesfaye, 2016). These micro-level benefits of associational life may aggregate upward to produce macro-level effects that reduce overall grievances and incentives for armed rebellion, even within contexts marked by poverty, inequality, and political exclusion.

Opportunity theories focus more attention on factors that influence the feasibility and costs associated with armed rebellion to explain civil war onset. Grievances are ubiquitous across countries, so the strength of the state likely determines the opportunity for conflict. Specifically, weak states that struggle to exercise and extend their authority are generally thought to increase the likelihood that the aggrieved will launch an armed challenge (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> I do not address how civil society may be integrated with greed explanations of civil war onset. Arguments that the availability of lootable resources may prompt armed rebellion (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004) have been convincingly discounted (Dixon, 2009; Fearon, 2005; Ross, 2004).

Likewise, minimal employment opportunities and generally weak socioeconomic conditions lower the opportunity costs for dissidents to pursue a violent challenge to the political or territorial status quo (Collier & Hoeffler, 2004). A variant of these arguments focuses on how anocratic regimes, or those that mix authoritarian and democratic institutional components, may be especially weak since they lack the conflict mitigating advantages of either strongly coercive autocratic regimes or compromise-inducing democratic institutions (Hegre, 2014). In general, when it is easiest and requires the fewest sacrifices, armed challenges against the state become most opportune.

Civil society can sharpen understandings of opportunity explanations of civil war onset in three ways. First, civil society organizations are associated with an array of methods to influence government behavior and policy other than violence. This includes forms of advocacy and lobbying (Amenta et al., 2010; Boix & Posner, 1998; Booth & Richard, 1998), as well as extra-institutional measures such as nonviolent action and protest campaigns (Boulding, 2014; Bratton & van de Walle, 1992; Way, 2014). This influence has also been observed in civil war termination and post-conflict stability, with studies demonstrating correlations between civil society and the implementation and durability of peace settlements, (Kew & Wanis-St. John, 2008; Nilsson, 2012). Civil society organizations have demonstrated resilience and persistence even when governments adopt more authoritarian tendencies, as observed in Latin America and Eastern Europe during the 1970s and 1980s (Almeida, 2003; Bernhard, 1993). For these reasons, a strong and robust civil society will furnish the aggrieved with other options to advance their agenda when opportunities to challenge the status quo emerge.

Second, and relatedly, even in weak states civil society can sometimes thrive and even complement or supplant the state. Rather than challenge weak states, community-level organizations and associations will instead provide the basic dispute-resolution, health, financial, and other governance services that weak states do not (Bratton, 1989; Paffenholz & Spurk, 2006). When weak, the central government may even enter into tacit negotiations with these associations over the enforcement of rules and management of resources (Menkhaus, 2014; Migdal, 2001). Previous case studies have identified a strong civil society and associational life in unexpected contexts, including Yemen, Yugoslavia, Bolivia, and elsewhere (Almeida, 2003; Boulding, 2014; Bratton, 1989; Porta, 2017). With the existence of these various types of civil society organizations, a form of politics and bargaining can emerge, mitigating the onset of civil wars.

Third, armed rebellion and civil war come with high costs and uncertainty (Fearon, 1995), and these may be particularly consequential for civil society and associational life. Previous research has shown that social structures and networks can be dramatically transformed by the occurrence of civil war (Wood, 2008). Armed conflict discourages common forms of assembly and social interaction, and likely imperils the ability of civil society organizations and associations to convene members and conduct their normal affairs. As violence spreads and intensifies, the effect may be existential for various community groups, recreational associations, nongovernmental groups, or other organizations. Even if the opportunity to rebel presents itself, associations and civil society organizations may perceive the option of armed insurgency as too costly to bear. Civil war onset is mitigated as a consequence. In fact, a critical reason civil society organizations may adopt nonviolent methods as opposed to armed rebellion may be to

avoid the comparatively more uncontrollable disruptive side effects of violence on the ability of organizations to persist (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001, p. 125).

Civil society is no panacea for civil war. Weak state capacity and high levels of poverty are not displaced or overturned by the presence of numerous and strong civil society organizations. These and other phenomena continue to have an influence on civil war occurrence, but so might civil society. The nature and structure of associational life may be important considerations among the many that shape the incentives and opportunities for armed rebellion, potentially in ways that reduce the likelihood of civil war onset.

Given these considerations, the analysis here will propose and test four hypotheses regarding the level and qualities of civil society and the incidence of civil war onset. First, higher participation in civil society should lead to higher levels of overall social capital, and greater empowerment vis-à-vis the state should reduce whether grievances contribute to civil war onset or open alternative methods for addressing them.

*Hypothesis 1. Higher rates of participation in civil society organizations should reduce the likelihood of civil war onset.*

However, not all civil society organizations are alike, and this in fact is a major criticism of the discourse on civil society (Edwards & Foley, 1998). Many proponents of civil society often lump together village choral societies with activist groups agitating for change at the national level despite the very different activities of each. Thus, various types and attributes of civil society may determine its conflict mitigating potential.

For instance, associations and organizations can differ in scope and size. Putnam prefers to emphasize close-knit, predominantly community- or town-based organizations such as amateur sports groups, religious parishes, or community groups. However, some have pointed out that these groups produce more private goods than broadly shared public goods, and that this may reduce the ability of civil society to reduce collective action problems (Boix & Posner, 1998). Others have suggested that broadly encompassing national-level organizations tend to be the most consequential in terms of generating social capital across geographic distance as well as influencing major government behavior, policies, and reforms (Minkoff, 1997; Skocpol, Ganz, & Munson, 2000). Thus, smaller organizations may be less able to generate social capital, broadly shared public benefits, or pressure on governments to implement policy accommodations, thereby having a negligible or even positive effect on civil war onset.

*Hypothesis 2: Higher prevalence of small civil society organizations increases the likelihood of civil war onset.*

Associational life may also be organized along pre-existing social divides, such as ethnicity or class. Putnam himself identified this as problematic, and when organized as such, civil society may only reinforce social bonds, trust, and cooperation within groups, limiting the ability to build concomitant bridges across society. Excessive amounts of such bonding capital may only exacerbate inequalities and tensions (Berman, 1997; Chapman, 2008; Gurung & Shean, 2017; Putnam, 2001). This appears particularly problematic when considered in conjunction with the

fact that civil wars are often fought along ethnic lines (Denny & Walter, 2014). Diversity of membership within civil society organizations is therefore important for their ability to extend the breadth of social capital beyond specific identity groups, reducing grievances generated by forms of political and economic exclusion that follow ethnic or other social cleavages.

*Hypothesis 3. Higher levels of diversity of membership within civil society organizations should reduce the likelihood of civil war.*

Some voluntary associations tend to be more explicitly political or politically active than others. Interest groups, advocacy organizations, civil society “watch dogs,” and protest movements are all examples of the more politically oriented elements of civil society that directly engage with the state to advance political and policy preferences. More politically active and assertive civil society organizations may result in more frequent accommodations and adjustments to state behavior and policy as a regime in power and its bureaucracy navigate a complex landscape of advocacy and special interest associations whose assent and cooperation may be necessary to implement their agenda and maintain their power (Booth & Richard, 1998; Migdal, 2001). This may take the form of compromises on government subsidies or the inclusion of citizen groups in policy debates and reform. Such adjustments may be formal and explicitly institutionalized, but often they may be observed in selective enforcement or through bureaucratic implementation. Even in instances where such accommodation does not take place, higher numbers and capabilities of such politically active civil society organizations may be able to adopt mass mobilization efforts to exert greater coercive pressure on the state (Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011; Sharp et al., 2005). In other words, higher numbers of more capable advocacy and watchdog associations who push reforms reduce the likelihood of civil war onset by lowering the opportunity costs of pursuing nonviolent methods of advancing political and policy preferences.

*Hypothesis 4: Higher prevalence of politically-oriented and advocacy civil society organizations decreases the likelihood of civil war onset.*

## **Data and Methods**

To test the influence of variation in civil society on the onset of civil war, data on cross-national measures of civil society attributes from the Varieties of Democracy initiative is integrated with the quantitative model of conflict onset devised by Goldstone et al. (2010).

The Varieties of Democracy (VDEM) initiative features over 350 variables that capture dozens of different facets of political and social life in more than 170 countries and autonomous regions annually from 1900 through 2017. The variables are calculated based on the aggregation of survey responses from country experts. Some of these survey questions capture country expert perceptions of the quality and extent of civil society, and six are used here for analysis.

First, a reasonably straightforward proxy for overall civil society participation is available. It is a four-point ordinal scale that includes response options that range from negligible civil society participation, to minimal participation and few organizations, to minimal participation and many organizations, to frequent participation among many organizations. This should directly assess

whether a more populous and dense set of civil society organizations is correlated with lower levels of civil war onset. Country-year scores for this variable are used to test hypothesis 1.

The VDEM dataset also features a variable that captures the typical scope or size of civil society organizations. One survey question asks country experts to determine whether “large CSOs” predominate, and their answers are averaged into a continuous score from 0 to 1.0. This variable is used to test hypothesis 2. The influence of the scope of CSOs may be contingent on the overall rate of participation in civil society. Thus, participation is interacted with this variable to explore this possible conditional effect.

Capturing the diversity of membership within civil society organizations to test hypothesis 3 is complicated. No VDEM survey question explicitly asks whether participation in CSOs regularly includes representation of various ethnic, racial, linguistic, or other identity groups within a country. However, country experts are asked to provide scores for the extent to which women are included in civil society organizations. This score ranges on a five-point ordinal scale from almost never to almost always. This variable is used as a proxy to test hypothesis 3. This is not an ideal proxy for diversity of membership, but it may suffice as a rough measure of diversity. According to the VDEM dataset, women’s civil liberties index scores and measures of the level of equal protection of civil liberties across all ethnic, race, or identity groups at the country-year level are highly correlated ( $\rho = 0.72$ ). It is questionable whether such a relationship may hold at the organizational level, but here I rely on the assumption that the inclusion of women in civil society organizations demonstrates a diverse membership.

Lastly, three VDEM variables are used to examine hypotheses 4. VDEM respondents are asked to rank to what extent “among civil society organizations, are there anti-system opposition movements?” (VDEM codebook, v.6.1). Respondents are instructed that:

An anti-system opposition movement is any movement—peaceful or armed—that is based in the country (not abroad) and is organized in opposition to the current political system. That is, it aims to change the polity in fundamental ways, e.g., from democratic to autocratic (or vice-versa), from capitalist to communist (or vice-versa), from secular to fundamentalist (or vice-versa). This movement may be linked to a political party that competes in elections but it must also have a “movement” character, which is to say a mass base and an existence separate from normal electoral competition.

Respondents are then provided five options from which to score the prevailing state of civil society in their assigned country-years. These range from “none, or very minimal” through “There is a very high level of anti-system movement activity, posing a real and present threat to the regime.” Since the survey instructs country-expert respondents to consider armed groups as a part of civil society for this question, analyzing its relationship with civil war onset may generate spurious results. To avoid this, two additional variables are included. As a follow-up to VDEM’s question about the presence of anti-system CSOs, respondents are asked a series of yes/no questions about their characteristics. Two include whether such CSOs “work through legal channels, for the most part” and whether they “work through a mix of legal and extra-legal channels,” which refers to nonviolent protest, disobedience, or disruption. I use these variables to capture the prevalence of advocacy or politically oriented organizations within civil society.

These VDEM civil society variables are integrated into a reproduction of the Goldstone et al. model of civil war onset. This model was chosen for several reasons. First, its predictive accuracy of civil war onset in out-of-sample tests is among the best available of onset models. Other scholars have also used this model to extend it for further examination of state failure, conflict intervention, and various other conflict dynamics (Kaplan, 2017; P. Regan & Meachum, 2014). Second, it uses a limited number of variables, which allows for the addition of others with fewer potential issues for model performance or saturation.

The Goldstone model adopts a definition of civil war fairly consistent with the Correlates of War definition and with other standard models of civil war onset (Fearon & Laitin, 2003).<sup>4</sup> A state experiences a civil war onset in the year in which 1,000 battle deaths have accumulated in combat between the security forces of a state and a nonstate armed group seeking to alter the political or territorial status quo of the country. The 1,000-battle deaths threshold is a cumulative total and need not occur entirely in the year of onset. However, as these deaths accumulate over several years toward the 1,000 battle-deaths mark they must surpass 100 per year, signifying a single ongoing armed insurgency as opposed to multiple intermittent conflicts.

Only four explanatory factors are featured in the Goldstone model. Infant mortality rates are used to capture the overall level of development in the country. The presence of ongoing armed conflict in 4 or more neighboring states is included to reflect the opportunities for sanctuary, learning, alliances, and diffusion that such “bad neighborhoods” may provide. The armed conflicts in neighbors need not pass the 1,000-battle deaths threshold, but rather feature some lower-level of organized and armed violence, whether between the state and rebel groups or among two or more nonstate actors. To capture the effect that discrimination of marginalized identity groups on armed rebellion, it includes a dummy variable that signifies whether a country-year features the highest level of political or economic discrimination possible in the Minorities At Risk dataset.

The fourth factor featured in the Goldstone model captures the type of government regime in place in a country and is proxied through several dummy variables. Dichotomous variables are included for whether the prevailing regime is a partial autocracy or a full democracy, as denoted by scores on the Polity IV index of between 0 and -5 or more than 5, respectively. Two other dummies capture different types of partial democracies. One reflects whether a partially democratic regime – one with a Polity IV index score between 0 and 5 – features factionalism. Factionalism is defined as “sharply polarized and uncompromising competition between blocs pursuing parochial interests at the national level” within a partially democratic regime (Goldstone et al., 2010, p. 196). This factor is included to extend and challenge common arguments about the effect of anocracy on civil war onset. Anocracies mix low levels of the coercive capacity that autocracies use to suppress armed rebellion and the compromising and coordinating benefits that full democracies use to lessen the onset of violent conflict. This mix, as the argument goes, results in overall weakness and increases likelihood of armed rebellion. Goldstone et al. argue that civil war onset is not a consequence of anocracy, but rather the degree of factionalism that often exists within partial democracies. A dummy variable capturing the

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<sup>4</sup> Data was retrieved from <http://globalpolicy.gmu.edu/a-global-model-for-forecasting-political-instability/>

existence of such factionalism within partial democracies is used to test these claims, and the modeling results support their argument.

Goldstone et al. employ a case-control approach with conditional logistic regression to model the onset of civil war. Their data features 65 civil war onsets randomly selected from the universe of cases available from all country-years from 1955 through to 2003. Each of these 65 country-years featuring a civil war onset are then combined with three other country-year observations from the same region (i.e., Africa, Latin America, etc.) and time period that did not experience civil wars. These three additional country-year observations serve as the control cases, though 2 observations are excluded due to unavailability of civil society data. Region and time period are modeled using fixed effects. All explanatory variables, including attributes of civil society, are lagged two-years prior to civil war onset to reflect the prevailing conditions immediately prior to the conflict and to minimize endogeneity.<sup>5</sup> Descriptive statistics are included for in Table 1.

The use of logistic regression with country-year as the unit of analysis is a blunt method of analysis. Research on civil war has recently begun to focus on variation in violence within countries as well as on specific dyads of state and armed nonstate groups (Cunningham, Skrede Gleditsch, & Salehyan, 2009; Kalyvas, 2006). These approaches help focus analysis on specific mechanisms that influence conflict dynamics as well as reveal the iterative and interactive dynamics that link initial disputes, claims, and the adoption of violence. The method here is unable to explore such refined aspects of civil war dynamics, but it does have the advantage of being able to examine how general structural factors might correlate with civil war onset in ways that test general policy assumptions.

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

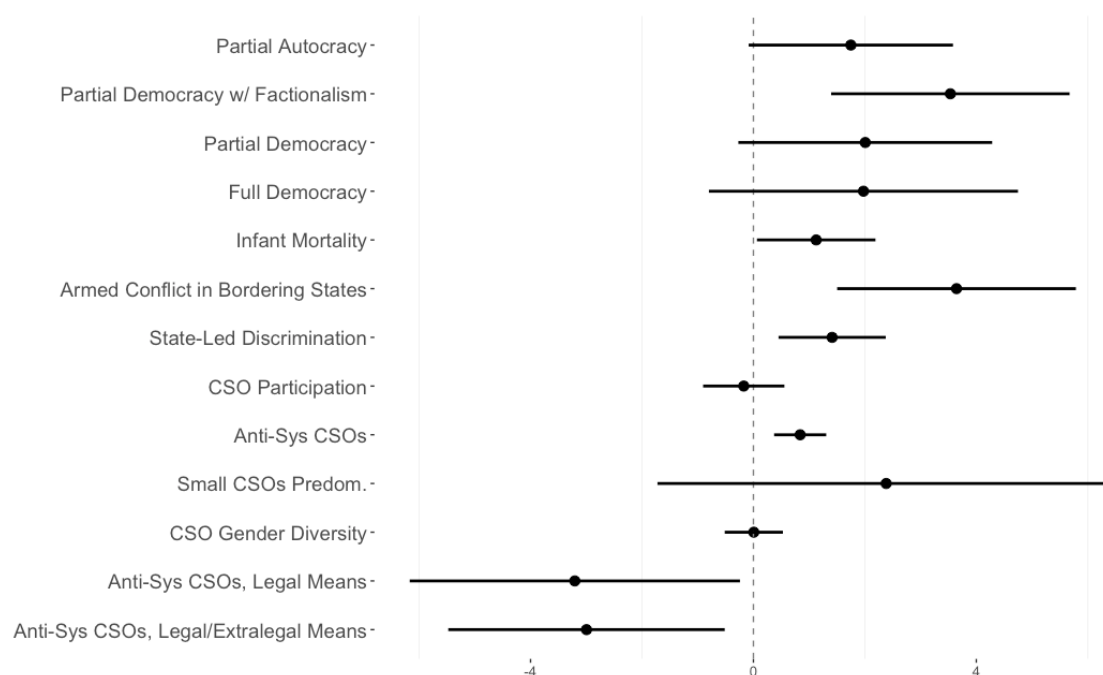
| Statistic                                    | N   | Mean    | St. Dev. | Min    | Max   |
|----------------------------------------------|-----|---------|----------|--------|-------|
| Partial Autocracy                            | 258 | 0.252   | 0.435    | 0      | 1     |
| Partial Democracy w/ Factionalism            | 258 | 0.078   | 0.268    | 0      | 1     |
| Partial Democracy w/o Factionalism           | 258 | 0.078   | 0.268    | 0      | 1     |
| Full Democracy                               | 258 | 0.081   | 0.274    | 0      | 1     |
| Infant Mortality (Log Normalized)            | 258 | -0.0003 | 0.837    | -2.361 | 1.236 |
| State Discrimination                         | 258 | 0.047   | 0.211    | 0      | 1     |
| Armed Conflict in 4+ Bordering States        | 258 | 0.411   | 0.493    | 0      | 1     |
| CSO Participation                            | 258 | 1.349   | 1.063    | 0      | 3     |
| Anti-System CSOs                             | 258 | 1.256   | 1.185    | 0      | 4     |
| Large CSOs Predominate                       | 258 | 0.065   | 0.112    | 0.000  | 0.600 |
| Gender Inclusion in CSOs                     | 258 | 2.868   | 1.129    | 0      | 4     |
| Anti-System CSOs rely on Legal Means         | 258 | 0.264   | 0.230    | 0.000  | 1.000 |
| Anti-System CSOs mix Legal, Extralegal Means | 258 | 0.319   | 0.230    | 0.000  | 1.000 |

<sup>5</sup> In 13 cases, civil society data is lagged 3, 4, or 5 years due to unavailability of 2-year lagged data.

## Analysis and Model Output

Contrary to commonly held beliefs and assumptions underlying U.S. foreign policy, many attributes of civil society appear to exert negligible conflict mitigating properties. In fact, according to the variables analyzed here (See Figure 2 and Appendix) null effects predominate, with neither consistently positive nor negative associations between various aspects of civil society and civil war occurrence. Higher rates of participation in civil society, higher prevalence of small civil society organizations, and higher levels of diversity within civil society organizations all display no statistically significant correlation with civil war onset. Thus, the model results provide no clear support for hypotheses 1, 2, or 3. Even when these variables are interacted with one another to test whether the effect of diversity or size of CSOs is conditional on the rate of participation in civil society, no significant correlations emerge (results not shown).

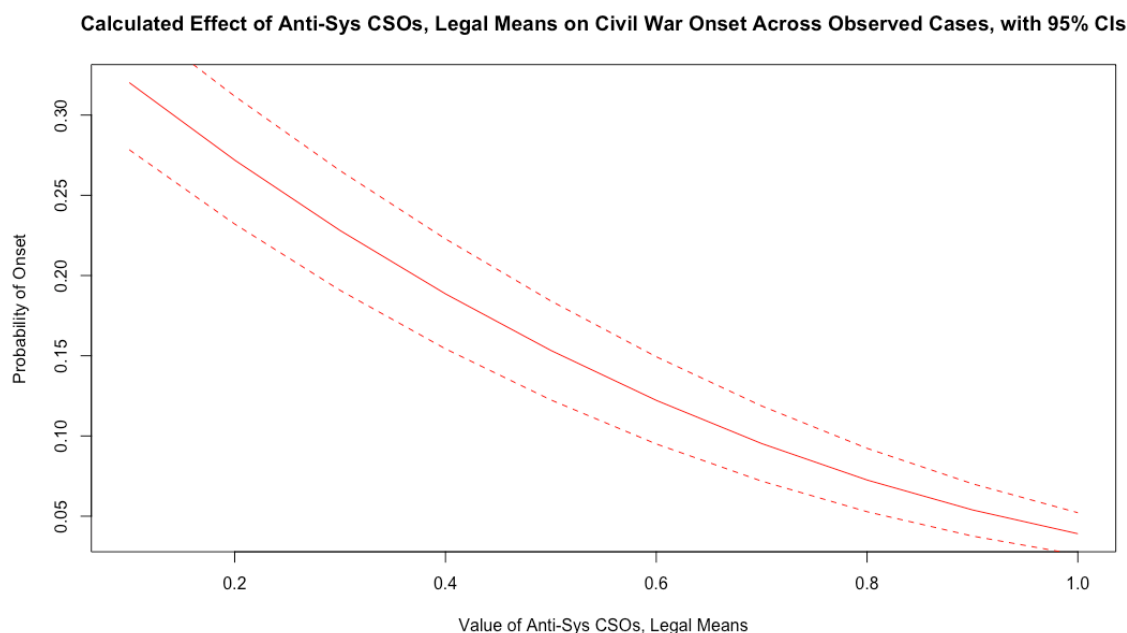
**Figure 2. Parameter Estimates with 95% CIs for Model of Civil War Onset**



The results, however, are not all inconclusive. The presence of a strong advocacy streak within civil society appears to substantially reduce the likelihood of conflict. The presence of anti-system CSOs is associated with an increase in civil war onset, but this effect is amply reversed when these CSOs rely on legal means of advancing their anti-status quo agenda. An assertive civil society that works through institutional channels is associated with a reduction in the onset of civil wars, providing substantial support for hypothesis 4 regarding the influence of advocacy-oriented civil society groups. Likewise, when these advocacy CSOs use extra-legal tactics such as protests and demonstrations the likelihood of civil war onset is also reduced.

In other words, a more politically engaged and advocacy-oriented civil society is strongly associated with civil war prevention. The impact is substantial. Holding all observed cases in the data to their average value, the mean probability of civil war onset is 34 percent<sup>6</sup> when anti-status quo CSOs do not rely on legal means (Anti-Sys CSOs, Legal Means = 0.0) and just 1.1 percent when these same CSOs fully rely on legal means (Anti-Sys CSOs, Legal Means = 1.0), a drop of 33 percentage points. Figure 3 further demonstrates the dramatic decrease in the average predicted probability of civil war onset across observed cases when the value of the anti-status quo CSOs that rely on legal means increases from a value of 0.0 to 1.0.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 3. Calculated Effect of “Anti-Sys CSOs, Legal Means” on Civil War Onset Across Observed Cases, with 95% CIs**



The performance of the model also increases, with the pseudo- $R^2$  value increasing nearly 50 percent to 0.32. The model is able to predict events reliably well and produces few false positives of civil war onset (AUC score = 0.93; see appendix for ROC plot).<sup>8</sup> These results reinforce the importance of considering civil society and social organization in assessments of civil war onset.

The model output is robust to several different specifications. First, the model was rerun with a separate sample that included a different set of control cases. While the strength of the statistical significance for several variables does weaken, the coefficient values for all variables remain largely the same, including those for advocacy-oriented CSOs working through legal channels (see Appendix). The regression was also rerun using a linear probability model with fixed effects

<sup>6</sup> This high likelihood of civil war onset is partially due to the fact that because of Goldstone et al's case-control research design roughly a quarter of all the cases in the dataset are civil wars.

<sup>7</sup> Predicted probabilities were calculated using logistic regression rather than the conditional logistic regression procedure. Goldstone et al. (2010) use the same approach.

<sup>8</sup> AUC score = 0.89 with an out of sample test. An AUC score of 1.0 indicates a perfect ability to predict true positives and negatives.

for region-period, and the results do not substantially differ from the conditional logistic regression output (see Appendix).

Civil society strength is sometimes perceived as a product of democratization and regime type or at least that these factors are closely related, the model was rerun including interaction terms for anocracy and anti-status quo CSOs that use legal means. Doing so can help identify whether some conditional relationship is at work or whether there may be a more complex causal process linking regime type, civil society, and civil war onset. The interaction terms are not significant and do not substantially alter the measured effects of advocacy CSOs on civil war onset (see Appendix). Linear probability models were also used to regress anocracy on anti-status quo CSOs and whether these CSOs relied predominantly on legal means. The results are mixed. Partial autocracies and partial democracies with factionalism are positively associated with the existence of anti-status quo CSOs, suggesting some possible linkage between these factors. However, there is no statistically significant relationship between either type of anocratic regime and the existence of anti-status quo CSOs that rely on legal means to pursue their agenda. In other words, the existence of advocacy oriented CSOs does appear to have some association with civil war onset independent of regime type. Quantitative work at a more refined level of analysis or more in-depth case examination may be necessary to provide greater clarity on these issues and precise causal orderings.

## Discussion

Variation in civil society appears to influence the likelihood of civil war onset, but in ways that depart from common claims in academic and policy debates. A “vibrant” civil society that features widespread participation and diverse constituencies does not appear to affect conflict onset. Likewise, the scope or size of organizations within civil society also exerts little influence on the incidence of civil war. Together, this suggests that social capital, as a byproduct of civil society and associational life, has a negligible association with civil war (see Table 2). Greater levels of inter-personal trust and norms of reciprocity may increase along with participation and diversity within numerous associations and civil society organizations, but it seems to bear no correlation with civil war prevention. Social capital may not be an important factor in the emergence of internal armed rebellion, even if it influences the performance of armed insurgents, as argued by Weinstein (2007), Staniland (2014), and others.

**Table 2. Hypotheses Examined and Results**

| <i>Hypothesis</i>                                                                                                                   | <i>Mechanism</i> | <i>Model Results</i> |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|----------------------|
| H1. Participation in civil society organizations should reduce the likelihood of civil war onset.                                   | Social Capital   | Unsupported          |
| H2: Higher prevalence of small civil society organizations increases the likelihood of civil war onset.                             |                  | Unsupported          |
| H3. Higher levels of diversity of membership within civil society organizations should reduce the likelihood of civil war.          |                  | Unsupported          |
| H4: Higher prevalence of politically-oriented and advocacy civil society organizations decreases the likelihood of civil war onset. | Voice            | Supported            |

Civil society does appear to reinforce citizens' voice vis-à-vis the state. The presence of assertive and anti-status quo civil society organizations that operate through legal means substantially reduces the onset of civil war. Presumably by providing an alternative means to advance grievances and political agenda, civil society can decrease the probability that a civil war might emerge. This is consistent with the overarching logic of U.S. foreign policy, which has explicitly emphasized advocacy and voice as a way to minimize instability. In a 2014 speech on U.S. policy toward civil society, President Barack Obama remarked that "promoting civil society that can surface issues and push leadership is not just in keeping with our values, it's not charity. It's in our national interests....When these rights are suppressed, it fuels grievances and a sense of injustice that over time can fuel instability or extremism. So I believe America's support for civil society is a matter of national security" (White House, 2014). Based on data analyzed here, there appears to be evidence supporting the logic behind U.S. support for civil society as a means to mitigate violence and instability, particularly civil wars.

However, there are several other possible explanations as to why anti-status quo civil society organizations that rely on legal means may reduce civil wars. Per U.S. policy, such organizations may be able to advance reforms with the ruling regime that address popular grievances – serving as a functional equivalent of armed insurgency but without the cost and uncertainty.

Alternatively, they may have little success in delivering policy or political reform but at least foster a sense of efficacy and empowerment that dampens the resonance of calls for violent rebellion. In other words, they might reduce a sense of relative deprivation even if they do not deliver real political change. Civil society may also influence the strategizing and decision-making of would-be rebel leaders, prompting them to adopt (or perhaps seek to coopt) existing institutional or nonviolent methods of pursuing anti-status quo claims. Comparative and within-case analysis of several countries that were vulnerable to civil wars but able to avoid them due to the presence of an advocacy-oriented civil society may be able to provide greater clarity on how such organizations forestall conflict onset.

There are less generous interpretations of the model output as well. The strong negative association between anti-status quo CSOs that rely on legal means and civil war onset may merely conceal a strong normative preference for nonviolence. In other words, the effect of civil society may be spurious, with associational life exerting no exogenous effect on the incidence of civil war. Rather, any would-be rebels forswear violence on principle, not because they necessarily view a strong associational life as a preferred method of advancing their agenda. Rebels are merely committed to achieving their goals through legal and institutional means, regardless of their prospects. Such an interpretation also resurrects the difficulty with arguments referenced earlier regarding the conflict-mitigating effects of civil society – that they tend to embed an inherent normative preference for nonviolence within their conception of civil society. Any observed conflict mitigation, then, is due to these norms of nonviolence and not from attributes or strength of associational life. This does not clarify how to prevent civil war through civil society but only raises questions about the causes of these norms of nonviolence.

The results introduce other normative quandaries. Within policy circles, social capital is often a primary benefit that advocates of civil society emphasize. However, the null results for participation and diversity variables in the model output suggest that social capital has minimal civil war mitigating potential. Rather, it is the ability of civil society organizations to enhance

voice and accountability – especially organizations with an anti-status quo ideology that rely on legal avenues – that contributes to a lower likelihood of armed insurgency. This complicates the thinking behind a policy of supporting civil society to prevent conflict. Were higher levels of social capital providing conflict-mitigating benefits, the decision to extend support would be simple and less political. Some argue that this is actually the appeal of support for civil society for policymakers – it allows foreign governments to intervene in internal political affairs of another country but the officials are able to convince themselves that such intervention is apolitical (Orjuela, 2005).

But if increasing the number and strength of anti-status quo civil society organizations is necessary to prevent conflict, should the United State or other foreign countries seek to pursue this as policy? While not completely unproblematic, providing funding or assistance to recreational or cultural associations is far less fraught than strengthening groups that seek constitutional reforms, devolution of power and authority, or wholesale transformations of other countries. Such a policy conflicts more directly with principles of respecting the norm of sovereignty and non-interference, even if it might reduce the likelihood of civil war occurrence. While the findings here indicate that civil society can reduce the onset of civil wars, the way in which it operates does generate normative challenges for policy and practical application.

In the event that funds or other assistance are provided to anti-status quo civil society organizations, it seems plausible that this could touch off a dynamic process. Figuring that demands from civil society organizations that are bankrolled by foreign governments are not representative of actual domestic support for reforms but merely represent a foreign agenda, a government may simply ignore civil society or decide to ratchet up repressive measures, disregarding the likelihood of any domestic backlash. Or groups that receive foreign funding may expand or escalate their demands on their government, assuming that they will benefit from further external assistance regardless of the broader popularity of their objectives. There is, in other words, high potential for moral hazard and misinterpretation of capabilities and resolve that snowball into broader instability. Unexpected and extensive state-based violence could result, potentially prompting civil society to defend themselves with arms. Otherwise typical disputes may spiral into violence as a result of a variety of dynamic interactions. The potential for misinterpretation or escalation seems particularly high considering that many studies of nongovernmental organizations in developing countries determine that such groups are entirely reliant on foreign funding and may not even exist without it (AbouAssi, 2013; Chahim & Prakash, 2014; Ron, Pandya, & Crow, 2016).<sup>9</sup> Then again, many civil society organizations that receive funding from abroad often adopt anodyne tactics and issues so as to protect their prospects for future funding while simultaneously avoiding scrutiny and interference from their home governments (S. S. Bush, 2015).

The findings also provide a general and imprecise examination of how attributes of civil society may influence civil war onset. Numerous different types of organizations, each with different interests and forms of political or social leverage, are lumped together. High levels of participation in cultural or recreational associations may bear comparatively less political influence than even moderately sized groups of professional or business associations (Wood,

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<sup>9</sup> Other scholars have pointed out, however, that these recipients have minimal connections with citizens and intentionally adopt strategies that avoid politics or mobilization (Bano, 2008; S. Bush, 2015).

2001). Through strikes and boycotts, labor unions can impose immediate and significant economic costs and disruptions whereas the same is not necessarily the case with nongovernmental organizations. Some civil society organizations may also feature political and economic elites as members, thereby more directly exercising forms of persuasion or sanctioning of key decision makers (Tsai, 2007). The effect of these various types of civil society on civil war onset may also depend on the form of government or security forces with which they engage or potentially with idiosyncratic contextual issues within a state. In other words, measures of the association between civil society participation and civil war onset, including the null results identified here, may overlook causal heterogeneity. Some types of civil society may in fact be associated with armed rebellion (Staniland, 2014; Weinstein, 2007) while others could be predisposed to nonviolent strategies (Boulding, 2014; Chenoweth & Stephan, 2011), and the aggregate effect of civil society on civil war onset is cancelled out. A better deconstruction and cataloguing of CSOs by type, leverage, and membership and how they might operate in different political and security contexts should reveal more precisely how civil society can affect the incidence of civil conflict and war. This could indicate when participation rates do and do not matter. The analysis here, and the general claims from policymakers that motivate it, is unable to suggest or detect how potentially more nuanced processes operate.

## Conclusions

The United States and many other countries increasingly espouse the importance of supporting civil society organizations in countries around the world. Funding and other forms of support are extended to such entities to enhance economic development, improve political stability, and reduce conflict and violence. Specifically, by increasing levels of social capital and/or enhancing the ability of citizens to exercise voice and hold governments to account, higher rates of participation, greater diversity of membership, larger and more encompassing organizations, and more advocacy-oriented civil society organizations are believed to mitigate and prevent violent conflict.

Contrary to policy expectations, data on such attributes of civil society at the state level does not appear to be associated with lower incidence of civil war onset. Only the presence of anti-status quo civil society organizations operating through legal and/or extra-legal means is related to a lower likelihood of civil war occurrence. These findings suggest the limited conflict-mitigating capacity of higher levels of social capital generated through higher levels of civil society participation or diversity. Any potential within civil society to prevent conflict appears to be embedded in its ability to enhance citizens' voice. While this does reinforce one of the core justifications of U.S. policy support for civil society, it also raises broader normative questions about the desirability of assisting anti-status quo civil society organizations so as to prevent civil wars.

The findings raise several unanswered questions. First, a more precise understanding of the mechanisms that link anti-status quo civil society organizations with lower incidence of civil war is necessary. Do such civil society organizations actually produce the reforms and government accountability that address would-be rebel grievances, or does it merely enhance a sense of efficacy without genuine changes in government behavior and structure? Within-case analysis or

comparative approaches might better reveal these mechanisms. A more precise analysis of civil society as a whole, including the varying interests and forms of leverage that its constituent parts bring to bear, can also sharpen understandings of the influence of civil society beyond broad-based notions of higher participation, more diversity, or the size of prevailing organizations. How and whether civil society organizations include members of political and economic elites and enhance interaction between masses and non-elites may also be an important way in which civil society influences government policy, reform, and the onset of civil wars.

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## Appendix: Model Output

|                                          | <i>Dependent variable: Civil War</i> |                                 |                                 |                                 |                                  |                                 |
|------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
|                                          | (1)                                  | (2)                             | (3)                             | (4)                             | (5)                              | (6)                             |
| Partial Autocracy                        | 1.943 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.625)      | 2.120 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.718) | 1.912 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.620) | 1.989 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.632) | 1.400 <sup>*</sup><br>(0.785)    | 1.749 <sup>*</sup><br>(0.936)   |
| Partial Democracy with<br>Factionalism   | 3.350 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.727)      | 3.472 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.777) | 3.373 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.729) | 3.346 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.742) | 3.226 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.978)  | 3.535 <sup>***</sup><br>(1.092) |
| Partial Democracy w/o<br>Factionalism    | 0.981<br>(0.786)                     | 1.207<br>(0.904)                | 0.998<br>(0.788)                | 0.908<br>(0.789)                | 1.825 <sup>*</sup><br>(1.007)    | 2.007 <sup>*</sup><br>(1.163)   |
| Full Democracy                           | 0.545<br>(0.918)                     | 0.819<br>(1.073)                | 0.550<br>(0.929)                | 0.438<br>(0.934)                | 1.844<br>(1.229)                 | 1.975<br>(1.415)                |
| Infant Mortality                         | 1.635 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.484)      | 1.629 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.487) | 1.589 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.486) | 1.542 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.485) | 1.240 <sup>**</sup><br>(0.528)   | 1.127 <sup>**</sup><br>(0.543)  |
| Armed Conflict in 4+<br>Bordering States | 2.815 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.818)      | 2.752 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.815) | 2.836 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.830) | 2.990 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.843) | 3.541 <sup>***</sup><br>(1.040)  | 3.645 <sup>***</sup><br>(1.094) |
| State-Led Discrimination                 | 1.172 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.361)      | 1.148 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.361) | 1.115 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.366) | 1.071 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.367) | 1.536 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.478)  | 1.413 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.491) |
| CSO Participation                        |                                      | -0.156<br>(0.301)               |                                 |                                 |                                  | -0.174<br>(0.373)               |
| Gender Part. CSOs                        |                                      |                                 | -0.135<br>(0.196)               |                                 |                                  | 0.007<br>(0.267)                |
| Small CSOs Predom.                       |                                      |                                 |                                 | 2.454<br>(1.749)                |                                  | 2.383<br>(2.094)                |
| Anti-Sys CSOs                            |                                      |                                 |                                 |                                 | 0.861 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.236)  | 0.839 <sup>***</sup><br>(0.239) |
| Anti-Sys. CSOs, legal<br>channels        |                                      |                                 |                                 |                                 | -3.128 <sup>**</sup><br>(1.426)  | -3.205 <sup>**</sup><br>(1.512) |
| Anti-Sys CSOs, mix<br>legal/extra-legal  |                                      |                                 |                                 |                                 | -3.232 <sup>***</sup><br>(1.246) | -2.996 <sup>**</sup><br>(1.266) |
| Observations                             | 260                                  | 258                             | 258                             | 258                             | 258                              | 258                             |
| R <sup>2</sup>                           | 0.238                                | 0.237                           | 0.238                           | 0.242                           | 0.315                            | 0.319                           |
| Max. Possible R <sup>2</sup>             | 0.500                                | 0.500                           | 0.500                           | 0.500                           | 0.500                            | 0.500                           |
| Log Likelihood                           | -54.770                              | -54.562                         | -54.459                         | -53.766                         | -40.676                          | -39.996                         |
| Wald Test                                | 40.020 <sup>***</sup> (df = 8)       | 39.480 <sup>***</sup> (df = 9)  | 39.890 <sup>***</sup> (df = 9)  | 39.120 <sup>***</sup> (df = 9)  | 34.750 <sup>***</sup> (df = 11)  | 34.480 <sup>***</sup> (df = 14) |
| LR Test                                  | 70.679 <sup>***</sup> (df = 8)       | 69.943 <sup>***</sup> (df = 9)  | 70.150 <sup>***</sup> (df = 9)  | 71.535 <sup>***</sup> (df = 9)  | 97.716 <sup>***</sup> (df = 11)  | 99.075 <sup>***</sup> (df = 14) |

|                      |                    |                    |                    |                    |                     |                     |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
| Score (Logrank) Test | 65.761*** (df = 8) | 64.666*** (df = 9) | 65.487*** (df = 9) | 66.647*** (df = 9) | 86.106*** (df = 11) | 87.284*** (df = 14) |
|----------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------|

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*Note:* \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

*Note:* All models include fixed effects for region-period, but these are not shown.

# **Appendix: Robustness Checks – Logistic Regression (M1), LPM (M2), Alternate Sample (M3), and Interaction Terms (M4 & M5)**

|                                                          | <i>Dependent variable: Civil War</i> |                     |                              |                     |                     |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                                                          | <i>logistic</i><br>(M1)              | <i>OLS</i><br>(M2)  | <i>cdl. logistic</i><br>(M3) | (M4)                | (M5)                |
| Partial Autocracy                                        | 2.272**<br>(0.987)                   | 0.219*<br>(0.113)   | 1.714**<br>(0.790)           | -0.747<br>(2.718)   | 0.906<br>(1.164)    |
| Partial Democracy with Factionalism                      | 5.308***<br>(1.233)                  | 0.554***<br>(0.117) | 2.385***<br>(0.787)          | 2.720<br>(2.077)    | 5.380**<br>(2.666)  |
| Partial Democracy w/o Factionalism                       | 2.675**<br>(1.248)                   | 0.170<br>(0.118)    | 1.106<br>(0.861)             | 1.658<br>(1.127)    | 1.914*<br>(1.151)   |
| Full Democracy                                           | 2.951*<br>(1.592)                    | 0.184<br>(0.143)    | 0.956<br>(1.358)             | 1.578<br>(1.395)    | 1.844<br>(1.408)    |
| Infant Mortality                                         | 2.011***<br>(0.680)                  | 0.149**<br>(0.065)  | 1.589***<br>(0.584)          | 1.214**<br>(0.551)  | 1.182**<br>(0.551)  |
| Armed Conflict in 4+ Bordering States                    | 5.709***<br>(1.351)                  | 0.565***<br>(0.132) | 2.782***<br>(0.920)          | 3.617***<br>(1.123) | 3.590***<br>(1.060) |
| State-Led Discrimination                                 | 2.539***<br>(0.608)                  | 0.215***<br>(0.057) | 1.500***<br>(0.490)          | 1.225**<br>(0.482)  | 1.267***<br>(0.476) |
| CSO Participation                                        |                                      | 0.001<br>(0.040)    | 0.161<br>(0.348)             | 0.013<br>(0.361)    | -0.053<br>(0.365)   |
| Small CSOs Predom                                        |                                      | -0.022<br>(0.030)   | 0.045<br>(0.241)             | -0.080<br>(0.258)   | -0.171<br>(0.283)   |
| Gender Part. CSOs                                        |                                      | 0.314<br>(0.265)    | 2.220<br>(1.792)             | 1.994<br>(2.101)    | 1.806<br>(2.250)    |
| Anti-Sys CSOs                                            | 1.396***<br>(0.303)                  | 0.138***<br>(0.028) | 0.409**<br>(0.195)           | 0.761***<br>(0.257) | 0.896***<br>(0.239) |
| Anti-Sys CSOs, mix legal/extra-legal                     | -<br>5.253***<br>(1.557)             | -0.358**<br>(0.139) | -1.918*<br>(1.037)           | -2.827**<br>(1.286) | -2.820**<br>(1.247) |
| Partial Autocracy*lead.anti_sys_CSOs                     |                                      |                     |                              | 0.902<br>(1.076)    |                     |
| Partial Dem. w/<br>Factionalism*lead.anti_sys_CSOs       |                                      |                     |                              | 0.359<br>(1.056)    |                     |
| Partial Autocracy*lead.anti_sys_legal_CSOs               |                                      |                     |                              |                     | 2.049<br>(3.526)    |
| Partial Dem. w/<br>Factionalism*lead.anti_sys_legal_CSOs |                                      |                     |                              |                     | -5.489<br>(6.355)   |
| Anti-Sys. CSOs, legal channels                           | -                                    | -0.287**            | -2.246*                      | -2.768*             | -2.773*             |

|                              |          |                         |                     |                     |
|------------------------------|----------|-------------------------|---------------------|---------------------|
|                              | 5.017*** |                         |                     |                     |
|                              | (1.790)  | (0.137)                 | (1.161)             | (1.439)             |
|                              |          |                         |                     | (1.513)             |
| Constant                     | -2.291   | 0.216                   |                     |                     |
|                              | (1.621)  | (0.225)                 |                     |                     |
| Observations                 | 258      | 258                     | 258                 | 258                 |
| R <sup>2</sup>               |          | 0.450                   | 0.278               | 0.317               |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>      |          | 0.215                   |                     | 0.318               |
| Max. Possible R <sup>2</sup> |          |                         | 0.500               | 0.500               |
| Log Likelihood               | -71.447  |                         | -47.562             | -40.278             |
| Akaike Inf. Crit.            | 294.894  |                         |                     | -40.249             |
| Residual Std. Error          |          | 0.385 (df = 180)        |                     |                     |
| F Statistic                  |          | 1.916*** (df = 77; 180) |                     |                     |
| Wald Test                    |          |                         | 38.120*** (df = 14) | 35.180*** (df = 15) |
| LR Test                      |          |                         | 83.944*** (df = 14) | 98.511*** (df = 15) |
| Score (Logrank) Test         |          |                         | 76.039*** (df = 14) | 86.786*** (df = 15) |

Note:

\*p<0.1; \*\*p<0.05; \*\*\*p<0.01

Note: All models include fixed effects for region-period, but these are not shown.

## Appendix: Robustness Checks – Bivariate LPMs

|                                 | <i>Dependent variable:</i> |                         |                               |                      |
|---------------------------------|----------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|----------------------|
|                                 | Anti-Sys CSOs              |                         | Anti-Sys CSOs use Legal Means |                      |
|                                 | (1)                        | (2)                     | (3)                           | (4)                  |
| Partial Autocracy               | 0.665**<br>(0.267)         |                         | -0.055<br>(0.053)             |                      |
| Partial Dem. w/<br>Factionalism |                            | 1.142***<br>(0.267)     |                               | -0.001<br>(0.054)    |
| Constant                        | 1.192***<br>(0.076)        | 1.158***<br>(0.074)     | 0.268***<br>(0.015)           | 0.264***<br>(0.015)  |
| Observations                    | 260                        | 260                     | 258                           | 258                  |
| R <sup>2</sup>                  | 0.023                      | 0.066                   | 0.004                         | 0.00000              |
| Adjusted R <sup>2</sup>         | 0.020                      | 0.062                   | 0.0003                        | -0.004               |
| Residual Std. Error             | 1.174 (df = 258)           | 1.148 (df = 258)        | 0.230 (df = 256)              | 0.230 (df = 256)     |
| F Statistic                     | 6.186** (df = 1; 258)      | 18.250*** (df = 1; 258) | 1.076 (df = 1; 256)           | 0.0002 (df = 1; 256) |

*Note:* \* p<0.1; \*\* p<0.05; \*\*\* p<0.01

## Appendix. Receiver Operating Characteristic Curve for Logistic Regression Model M1

