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## **Civil Society impact on Democracy**

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One of the commonly raised questions about these processes is whether elites or the general populace establish and strengthen democracy. Studies have stressed the role elites played in the growth of democracy numerous times. The same is true for the establishment of a strong elite group committed to democratic governance, which is necessary for the consolidation of democracy, according to one study.

Recent developments in Asia, however, show that it's critical to acknowledge the part that the general public played in democratisation and the establishment of democracy. In Indonesia, the Philippines, South Korea, or Thailand, democratisation would not have happened without the help of the people or civil society. Even though their involvement was just supportive, it helped the democratic transition and advanced democracy. It is amazing to see how much the civil society has contributed to the process as these countries now firmly establish their democracies.

What is civil society?

Civil society is a vague notion that signifies different things to different people. "Quite often, when the term 'civil society' is used in the political literature or the media, it is no longer clear what exactly the respective author has in mind," writes Lehbruch. 'Civil society' has come to mean many different things over time and in various national contexts, and these variations are crucial. As a result, there is a great deal of ambiguity surrounding the concept's meaning in current discourse". In any case, the idea of civil society as a middleman between the state and the private sector is now widely acknowledged in contemporary political science. As a result, the state and economic society, which consists of for-profit businesses, are distinguished from civil society. It also differs from family-life society. According to Larry Diamond, civil society is "the sphere of organised social life that is open, voluntary, and democratic governed by a law or a common set of regulations." Examples of civil society include private individuals working together to restrain the authority of the state and hold it responsible, pressing for government action, or openly expressing their preferences, ideas, and interests. Given this, civil society might comprise a broad range of organisations that address societal challenges. They include organisation with civic, issuefocused, religious, and educational interests. Nongovernmental organisations, or NGOs, are those that are informal and have a flexible framework.



## Civil Society and Democratization

Elites in Asia, particularly in Thailand, South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines, made substantial contributions to the democratisation of their nations. However, without the proactive involvement of civil society organisations, this result would not have been achievable. As a result of the political pressure they generated, authoritarian governments were eventually overthrown and political systems were liberalised. The Thai middle class was reinforced by the early 1990s economic growth, which also generated calls for greater political and social openness as well as democratisation. It was thought that Thailand was a strong country. State institutions, particularly the military and the bureaucracy, had politically slowed down the formation of social formations and interest groups. The tremendous economic expansion, however, reinforced the business community, the urban middle class, and civil society organisations.

To support the democratic aspirations of the urban middle class and to promote democratisation, a number of issue-focused organisations, like the Confederation for Democracy and environmental NGOs, have formed. Additionally, Prime Minister Prem Tinasulanond's semidemocratic administration (1980–1988) encouraged the expansion of political parties and contributed to the legitimacy of participatory institutions. His administration hastened the military's political role's demise. The Confederation of Democracy and other political organisations, which represent the urban middle class, aggressively fought the military's return to politics in 1991, pushing it to do so a year later.

After 1992, the power of civil society organisations grew even more, which is shown in their success in the late 1990s political reform campaigns. A stable, uncorruptible democratic administration was not produced by the democratisation process that got under way in 1992. Political parties continued to be weak and disorganised. Vote buying and other types of election fraud were becoming more prevalent in politics. In response, civil society organisations started efforts for fresh constitutional reform and more extensive political reform. In 1992, the then prime minister Anand Punyarachun founded a group named Pollwatch to oversee elections. The movement was led by the Confederation for Democracy, which gained popular support. The growing political corruption and the erratic political environment have already angered the urban middle class. The new Constitution was finally ratified in October 1997 after considerable delay, ushering in an important stage of political transformation and democratisation. In the Philippines, democratisation took place in the absence of economic expansion. The might of civil society and the deeply rooted democratic principles of the Filipino people enabled the overthrow of dictator Ferdinand Marcos' regime. Marcos was assisted in leaving office by the National People's Movement for Free Elections (NAMFREL), which was established to oversee the election and assembled hundreds of thousands of people to recapture the stolen election of 1986.

Marco's huge electoral fraud would not have been revealed and made public without the power of NAMFREL, and it would not have been possible to mobilise. Additionally,

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President Corazon Aquino, who resisted many coup attempts, was able to sustain democratic government because to the strength of civil society during her time. Another illustration of the power of civil society is the successful campaign to have Joseph Estrada removed from office due to corruption.

Two socioeconomic changes that aided Indonesia's transition to democracy were the growth of civil society and the middle class.

Another motivating aspect was easier access to education. These were the consequences of the economic boom. Suharto's economic policies in Indonesia, according to Donald Emmerson, led to polycentrism, which made the rule of the wealthy untenable. The emergence of civil society organisations, the expansion of ethnic groupings, and the increase of popular consciousness were characteristics of this polycentrism. Even though Suharto's New Order's economic success, particularly in the 1980s, contributed to legitimising his rule, by the 1990s this economic success had introduced the growing middle class to Western ideas like democracy. The New Order was intended to foster political stability and economic growth as well as to legitimise the military's grasp on power. However, as the urban middle class increased, ethnic groups that had seen economic success began to criticise Suharto's authoritarian administration more and more. Government disputes became more frequently violent. The New Order was no longer consistent with Indonesian society, which had grown more complicated and was on the cusp of the 1997– 1998 economic crisis.

Suharto was overthrown and democratic rule was established as a result of the economic crisis. Changes in the environment that favoured democracy as previously mentioned did not always or immediately lead to democracy. If the economic catastrophe hadn't taken place, Suharto's downfall might have been postponed. He persisted for a time despite having a tonne of evidence pointing to his corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency. But due to the rupiah's depreciation, the global financial crisis, the failure of financial institutions, and Suharto's inability to handle the crises, Suharto's reign had become unpopular. Finally, Suharto was forced to resign after losing his favour.

Student and worker protests in South Korea against authoritarian rule and calls for liberalisation and democratisation throughout the latter part of the 1980s served as a demonstration of the value of civil society in facilitating democratic transition. Additionally, the middle class presented a compelling case for real democratic transformation. Success among the middle class, students, and employees has had a direct impact on South Korea's industrialisation and economic progress. The middle class and working class in South Korea have historically been quiet and subservient. The students were the only ones who were politically engaged and had participated in past protests against the despotic regime.

However, attitudes towards coercive authority deteriorate among middle-class, labour, and civil society organisations after an extended period of economic expansion. A coalition of civil society organisations, including farmers, students, labour unions, journalists, authors,

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professors, and religious groups, managed to topple ChunDoo-hwan's dictatorial regime. The government's additional persecution in response sparked a wave of labour and student unrest. Since Roh Taewoo, a close colleague of Chun, had abandoned the dictatorship, Chun's legitimacy had been destroyed. Chun was forced to concede to the public's demands in order to implement true democracy with direct presidential elections as a result of these events.

### Civil Society and Democratic Consolidation

How to enable democratic consolidation is one of the issues these developing democracies must deal with. Thailand, the Philippines, South Korea, Indonesia, and the Philippines all still have fragile, ineffective democracies. They must be consolidated and strengthened. How might civil society aid in the consolidation of democracy in those developing democracies?

Consolidation of democracy: what is it? When a return to dictatorship is inconceivable, democracy is strengthened. For some people, democracy is strengthened when it becomes stable, active, effective, and responsible. In any case, the consolidation of democracy is a complex process that is influenced by both structural and cultural elements.

The elites' commitment to democracy is a prerequisite for consolidating democracy, to start. Elite support for democracy and belief in democratic values are necessary for democracy to flourish. These elites include leaders of organisations, legislators, well-known government figures, professors, corporate executives, and opinion leaders. Their commitment to democracy will make a return to an authoritarian form of governance challenging, if not impossible. If elites' political views vary and a large proportion of them support it, authoritarianism may resurface. However, the elites must behave democratically; just believing in democracy is not enough. For instance, it cannot be said that they are committed to democracy if they impose restrictions on political freedom and participation in order to retain their political dominance.

When the majority of the populace agrees that democracy is the finest form of government and is appropriate for the moment, democracy is strengthened at the level of the entire population. The general populace does not hold this opinion to be firmly established in developing democracies. Because of this, some organisations are frequently pressured and forced to wage war for their cause through force or other unethical tactics.

Third, democracy must have the support of organisations and organisations in order to be strengthened. In order to strengthen and deepen It can be very beneficial to have democracy, political parties, social movements, civil society organisations, interest groups, and other social organisations. They can be used to engage the public in politics and mobilise support for democratic values and principles.

Organisations from the civil society can support democracy in a variety of ways. By watching, regulating, and approving how the state uses its authority, civil society, in Diamond's opinion,



can assist ensure that the state is held accountable. In developing nations, where political corruption is rife, this feature could help reduce it.

It can compel the government to be more responsible, open, and accessible to the general population, which improves its legitimacy. By promoting democratic values and ideas, civil society organisations can significantly contribute to increasing the commitment of both the elite and the general public to democracy. Organisations active specifically in political change, as well as the defence of civil liberties, can be particularly crucial in this regard.

By encouraging political involvement, civil society organisations also contribute to the consolidation of democracy. Voluntary political involvement is not usually high in many new democracies. Political apathy and disinterest could impede the process of consolidation. The function of political parties in enticing individuals to participate in politics, particularly as election day voters, can be supplemented by civil-society organisations. Participation in politics enhances democratic government's institutionalisation and legitimacy, two factors crucial to its consolidation.

The contribution of civil society to people's empowerment is well acknowledged. Many democracies rely on civil society organisations to represent their citizens' interests and uphold their authority and rights. Many interest groups in some nascent democracies, including Indonesia and Thailand, are poorly organised and unable to clearly express their interests. Civil-society organisations can step in and assist individuals and interest groups in more successfully defending their rights, thereby empowering them. Future political leaders can also be trained by civil society organisations. People who participate in the activities of such groups get knowledge of how to lead and inspire others, promote initiatives, resolve disputes, and form alliances. This fosters effective political leadership and educates people how to handle political issues.

#### Asian civil society and the consolidation of democracy

How to strengthen democracy in Thailand is one of the biggest issues the nation is now facing. Thai civil society had been effective in imposing key reform programmes, such as the adoption of the 1997 constitution, and in democratising the political system. However, civil society organisations haven't done much to consolidate democracy. Several civil rights violations occurred in Chuan's rule (1998–2000). In an effort to achieve social justice, organisations, most notably the Assembly of the Poor, organised farmer protests and marches against state power. However, by the time Thaksin Shinawatra entered office in January 2001, the state had regained its vigour. His administration has implemented populist initiatives, such as basically free healthcare for all, funding village funds in every community, and a moratorium on agricultural debt. In theory, his policies ought to support the development of civil society and, by extension, of democracy. However, because of the





government's limitations on press freedom, intolerance of criticism and dissent, and cooptation of some press and civic organisations, civil society is increasingly coming under government control, creating concerns that Thailand will only longer be an electoral democracy.

The democratic administration in Indonesia is still ineffective. A stable and functional democratic administration has not been able to be established by President Megawati Sukarnoputri. The party system continues to be fragmented and unable to create ongoing support for the leadership or improve how responsively the government responds to the needs of the people. Indonesian civic society is still divided. National integration continues to be dangerously threatened by racial and religious conflict. There is no effective civil society to unite the populace and societal sectors.

The difficulties facing Indonesia's democratic consolidation are actually too complex for any civil society organisation to handle. Perhaps the military, the political party system, and political leadership play the most roles in Indonesia's efforts to consolidate democracy. Indonesia needs political leaders with the skills to mediate disputes between various racial and religious groups. If political parties want to be more successful at building support for the administration, they must grow. The military should resist the urge to overthrow the administration at the same time. Despite the fact that Indonesian democracy is still in its infancy, it still has widespread support, and if the military tried to stifle the democratic movement, a tremendous uprising would probably result.

Another illustration of how Philippine social groups actively monitor the functioning of state and political leaders is the fact that Estrada was forced to resign by the country's civil society, which demonstrated its strength in doing so. The Philippine state is still powerless, unable to defend its independence from influential sociocultural and corporate groupings. Both the elites and the general populace in the Philippines are firmly committed to democracy. But the development of a strong and dynamic civil society that can balance the state and powerful economic and sociocultural organisations that wish to rule the state is necessary for Philippine democracy to fully take root.

In the case of South Korea, the economic crisis of 1997 hastened the democratic transition by raising issues regarding the government's exclusive control over the welfare of the general populace and the authoritarian developmental state. Civil-society organisations were acknowledged as a "third power" as a result of the 1997 crisis, which diminished middle-class confidence in political leadership and strengthened and increased systemic criticism among civic groups. The population now has greater power and is more forceful in the political domain thanks to Korean civil society.

Thus, their voice is now more frequently heard. But in order for civil society organisations to better represent the public opinion, challenges must be solved. They must be more welcoming to widespread participation by regular people. The privileged currently control the majority.

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These organisations also need to be financially independent and able to fend off attempts to co-opt them by powerful individuals or corporations. Although having financial independence does not preclude civil society organisations from accepting funding from the government or other organisations, there shouldn't be any conditions attached.

### Conclusion

Civil society is crucial to the consolidation of democracy. It must be autonomous and capable of resisting exploitation by institutional and commercial interests. A strong civil society can represent the demands of the people and the community and serve as a check on the abuse of power by the government. There are indications that civil society in Asia's democracies is becoming increasingly powerful and influential. It will become increasingly strong, independent, and crucial to the development of democracy in the future. In order to further their own objectives, civil society organisations will become more active in raising public political awareness and promoting political engagement. As a result of these actions, elites and the general public will both be more devoted to democracy, and governments will be better able to cater to the needs of the populace and be accountable to them. As a result, democratic consolidation will occur.

Governments in Asian democracies have the authority to speed up the development of civil society. States can aid civil society organisations so that they can perform their obligations more successfully. This offers an alternative to the corporatist approach of directing and appropriating civil society. This help should be provided in the form of funding and staff development. Respecting the independence of civil society is also essential. Governments shouldn't be afraid of a free civil society since it makes them more honest, responsible, open to public demands, and transparent. These qualities will win the public's favour and increase their credibility.

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