

Civil Society after Democracy: The Evolution of Civic Activism in South Africa and Korea

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ABSTRACT *The phase of democratic consolidation can significantly impact the motives, dynamics and objectives of civil society. Its internal roles, dynamics and power balances are significantly altered by the advent of democracy, due to shifting resources, political opportunities, and a general reframing of goals and objectives. By adopting a definition of civil society as an 'arena' (which highlights the continuously evolving composition and leadership of civil society) and borrowing a number of theoretical dimensions from social movement theory (which underline the importance of resource mobilization, political opportunities and conceptual framing processes), the article shows that the advent of democracy has posed a number of challenges to civil society organizations in Korea and South Africa. Moreover, the consolidation of democracy has inevitably changed the nature of government-civil society relations. While in South Africa institutional politics reasserted itself in the first years of democracy, thereby sidelining organizations and movements concerned with public accountability and good governance (which have only recently resurfaced through the action of new social movements), in Korea corruption and lack of transparency immediately marred the dawn of democracy, providing civic movements with a fertile terrain to galvanize civic mobilizations vis-à-vis the lack of responsiveness of the political class.*

KEY WORDS: Civil society; consolidation of democracy; social movements; accountability; civil society-government relationship

Introduction¹

Much has been written about civil society's role in supporting the democratization of authoritarian regimes, but very little research has been conducted on the challenges and opportunities faced by civil society after the advent of democracy, that is, during the long process of democratic consolidation. This article aims to cast light on the evolution of civil society's activism during the consolidation of democracy by using two well-known case studies of democratization from authoritarian rule: South Africa and South Korea (henceforth Korea).

Despite having followed different developmental trajectories, South Africa and Korea share several analogies and important differences regarding the way in which civil society groups have ignited democratization and, more recently, have adapted to the changing context of democratic consolidation.

In South Africa, the United Democratic Front, a non-racial coalition of several hundred civic groups, church-based organizations, students' movements and trade unions, spearheaded the anti-apartheid resistance until the release of Nelson Mandela and his electoral success in 1994. In Korea, civic movements constantly opposed the power of the military juntas and, in June 1987, nationwide demonstrations brought about the collapse of the authoritarian regime and paved the way to the first democratic elections. In both countries, the democratization process presented new opportunities as well as challenges to civil society actors, thereby reshaping the balances and roles within the civic arena and also its interplay with the political sphere.

From a theoretical point of view, the democratization process is arguably the most convulsive and radical experience for civil society, as it requires a general reassessment of the latter's roles, priorities, modus operandi and strategies. It also requires a great deal of adaptation

in order to successfully shift from resistance struggle (that is the most common form of civic mobilization against authoritarian regimes) to the wider range of functions available in a democratic society, which can range from lobbying and advocacy to petitions and public demonstrations.

Our conceptual framework combines the spatial definition of civil society as an ‘arena’ (as opposed to conventional definitions describing civil society as an array of organizations) with some key elements borrowed by social movement theory, which we deem useful to identify key factors and processes affecting the evolving character of civil society after the advent of democracy. In addition, we also review the main literature on the relationship between civil society and democracy with a view to placing our analysis within the appropriate context of democratization studies. The central section analyzes the two case studies and discusses how the civil society arena has changed over time due to shifting resources, economic factors, and political discourses. Finally, the last section presents a general summary and some concluding remarks.

Civil Society and Democracy: A Conceptual Framework

Spatial Definition: Civil Society as an Arena

As noted in a 2001 issue of *The Economist*, civil society ‘is universally talked about in tones that suggest it is a Great Good, but for some people it presents a problem: what on earth is it?’ (Grimond, 2001, p. 18). In public debate and often also in academic literature the term civil society has been used as an analytical ‘hatstand’ (Van Rooy, 1998, p. 6), whose content and substance is much more *in the eyes of the beholder* than in sound analytical examination. In public discourse, the concept civil society has been largely used (and abused) but seldom defined. The media, for instance, uses the term quite haphazardly to describe whatever suits its news agenda at a given point in time: what is described as representing civil society today might not be viewed as part of it tomorrow. Also non-governmental organizations have been adding to this confusion, for instance by claiming to represent the ‘genuine’ civil society vis-à-vis other social actors, such as certain social movements or informal groups, which might not possess the same degree of formalization and ‘civility’ as the most professionalized associations, foundations, and charities. Such a definitional vagueness might have served journalists and opinion makers, but it has provided very little (if any) usefulness from a social research perspective.

In the academic debate, there have been various attempts at defining civil society.² Overall, it can be concluded that classificatory approaches condensing civil society into a *collective noun* have largely prevailed. The term has thus come to describe the array of non-governmental actors loosely sharing similar ideas, motives and values. Not surprisingly, this has led to a certain emphasis on the *organizational* element of civil society, as opposed, for instance, to informal gatherings and spontaneous demonstrations (which are not directly connected to any specific organization). As a consequence, both academics and, even more so, practitioners have focused on the so-called non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as the main representatives of civil society around the world. In this vein, civil society has become a collective noun describing the array of organizations that are separate from the state, enjoy autonomy in relation to the state, and are formed voluntarily by members of society to protect or advance their interests (White, 1996; Diamond, 1999). By and large, this re-elaboration of the concept has contributed to minimizing the differences between civil society, which is a densely political phenomenon, and a primarily economic reality such as the non-profit sector. In some cases, the latter has ended up replacing the former, especially in comparative analysis (Salamon, Sokolowski, & Associates, 2004).

More recently, an alternative definition has begun to surface in the scholarly debate (Heinrich, 2005; Heinrich & Fioramonti, 2007). This approach views civil society as an ‘arena’,

populated by groups, individuals and organizations sharing similar values and advancing common interests, rather than a collective noun describing certain types of organizations. By shifting the focus from the 'list' of organizations to the space for collective action, the 'arena' approach allows for a more flexible and evolving understanding of who belongs to civil society (and under what circumstances). The concept of an arena (or a sphere) highlights the fact that civil society's contours are not set in stone: to the contrary, they are fluctuating and adapt to changing contexts. While conventional understandings tend to be rather static (that is, who is *in* and *out* of civil society is decided once and for all based on the specific characteristics of each organization), the spatial approach allows for a more dynamic analysis of civil society's internal differences and its continuous evolution: civil society's membership is continuously in flux and its internal power balances are altered by external factors, thereby allowing certain groups to play a more leading role during certain critical phases and then be replaced by other (often newer) organizations and movements at a later stage. Whether a NGO, a social movement, a liberation group or even a business association, what defines its belonging to civil society is the function it performs at a given point in time. Thus, any of these actors would be entering the civil society arena when advancing common interests and leaving it when pursuing private goals (Heinrich 2005).³

Since our article intends to analyze the evolving character of civil society after the advent of democracy, we believe such a spatial approach is best suited to account for the internal dynamics dominating civil society (including ever-changing leadership and power balances) and its relationship with the external environment, especially the political sphere.

The Civil Society-Democracy Nexus

The relationship between civil society and democracy has permeated the history of Western political theory. Historically, it is possible to identify at least three main traditions of thought on this relationship. A first tradition, pioneered by Tocqueville and more recently retrieved by Robert Putnam, holds that the civil society arena provides a breeding ground for democratic values because its interactive character and internal networks contribute to building interpersonal trust, civic commitment and social capital (Putnam, 2001). In this account, the impact on democracy plays out on the horizontal level, given that civil society is seen as contributing to democracy by democratizing society itself. The other two traditions, instead, view the relationship between civil society and democracy through a vertical perspective, insofar as civil society is understood as having a specific relationship with the political system and, more directly, with the state. For liberal thinkers, civil society is a bottom-up driver of democracy because it counters the authoritarian tendencies of the state and energizes citizens' activism in defence of civil and political rights (Seligman, 1992). Thus, the civil society arena becomes the locus of civic resistance against any forms of political abuse. By contrast, the third tradition - which traces its origins back to the German philosopher Hegel, followed by critical thinkers such as Karl Marx - denies that civil society is an agent of democracy and predominantly views it as a vehicle of top-down cultural permeation throughout society according to the order imposed by the state.

In contemporary political analysis, the empirical relationship between civil society and democracy has also been subject to different (and often diverging) viewpoints. In the 1970s-early 1980s, most studies of democratization attributed only a marginal (if any) role to civil society movements. Centre stage was given to political elites and their 'pacted transitions' rather than to citizens' groups promoting bottom-up activism (O'Donnell & Schmitter, 1986). Then the late 1980s and early 1990s turned things around, as political developments demonstrated the hitherto neglected potential of civil society's protests: not only did social movements and trade unions lead the demonstrations against the socialist regimes of Eastern Europe, but they also spearheaded social unrest against authoritarianism in Asia and Africa. Thus, in the wake of a renewed enthusiasm for the snowball effect of the 'third wave' (Huntington, 1991), civil society was abruptly catapulted into the spotlight. It started being described as the new panacea for

democracy: for some, the carving out of a modest liberalization of civil society in non-democratic states held the potential for broader democratic reform (Diamond, 1992; Ignatieff, 1995); for others, the strengthening of civil society was essential to improving the quality of still-fragile democratic procedures in post-transition situations (Monshipouri, 1997; Pearce, 1997). Discovered in the context of transitions from authoritarian rule, civil society came gradually to be portrayed as a crucial element also in the phase of consolidation of democracy (Diamond, 1994, p. 7).

Civil Society in Democratic Consolidation

Needless to say, the centrality of civil society depends on the notion that one has of democratic consolidation. If consolidation of democracy is viewed, first and foremost, as the process of institution building of a democratic regime, it is evident that the sphere of civic activism becomes relatively less important than the institutional arrangements. By contrast, if one understands democratic consolidation as a long-term process of continuous diffusion of democratic practices at both elite and mass levels (Pridham, 1995), then civil society automatically becomes fundamental for a successful consolidation: it can indeed encourage popular participation, promote vertical accountability, and play the 'transmission belt' role between society and the state, by aggregating and promoting citizens' demands in ways that are crosscutting and may potentially mitigate political conflict (Diamond, 1999; Geremek, 1992). Civil society can also contribute to consolidating democracy by deepening it. This can be done, for instance, by promoting human rights in disadvantaged communities or rural areas where state jurisdiction struggles to penetrate, or by running voters' education campaigns and educating citizens on democratic forms of conflict resolution and participation.

If, on the one hand, there is enough evidence of the positive impact that a vibrant civil society may have on the consolidation of democracy, some, on the other hand, have warned against assuming that civil society is an 'unmitigated blessing for democracy' (Schmitter, 1993, p. 14). Civil society is indeed operating in an arena characterized by power struggles, political allegiances and rivalries, which might exacerbate (rather than mitigate) political polarities in a new democratic polity. Moreover, civil society's activism might make it more difficult for political elites to find middle grounds and compromises across the political spectrum, further dividing citizens into factions. Ultimately, it can prove to be 'not one but several civil societies – all occupying the same territory and polity, but organizing interests and passions into communities that are ethnically, linguistically or culturally distinct – even exclusive' (Schmitter, 1993, pp. 14-15).

Civil Society and Politics: Some Additional Insights from Social Movement Theory

Due to its inherent focus on the political aspects of civic activism, the analytical tradition of social movement studies can be aptly used to also make sense of (or at least cast some light on) the behaviour of civil society groups before and during the phase of democratic consolidation. According to a *resource mobilization* approach, for instance, collective social action is driven by the creation, consumption, exchange, transfer or reallocation of resources among actors within civil society (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; McAdam, 1999). Since the civil society sphere is internally dynamic and continuously adapting, the way in which resources are distributed and mobilized (especially by groups of citizens interested in defending and promoting their interests) ultimately has an impact on the issues and demands taken up by leading civil society groups. The capacity to mobilize human, economic and also technological resources is therefore critical to account not only for the rise of civil society groups but also for the identification of those playing a leading role during a particular period. At the same time, the mobilization of resources does not happen in a vacuum: civil society is indeed immersed in society at large and can derive resources from external sectors. Thus, the relationship between civil society organizations and other actors (e.g., government, the private sector, international donors,

transnational movements, etc.) is another important element to factor in, as it has an inevitable impact on the distribution of resources within the civil society arena.

The political system also affects the shape, dynamism and contours of civil society, for it can offer opportunities to sustain mobilization and encourage or even inhibit collective action. According to the *political opportunity structure* approach, civil society actors rise and develop primarily because of ‘opportunities’ in the political system (Tarrow, 1989; Meyer, 2004). For instance, the spread of certain grievances and demands among the population can be exploited by one or more social movements to acquire a leadership role within the civic arena and steer civil society’s interaction with or opposition to government. These opportunities are by definition time-bound and context-dependent: they change over time and are significantly altered, among others, by the evolution of the democratization process. Economic demands, critical junctures, openness and accountability of political elites, and levels of tolerance within society are just some examples of potential opportunities that may encourage or discourage the rallying of civil society around specific campaigns. During the democratization process, participation often intensifies with the opening of new access channels to the political system (which often leads to increased protests during the phase of political liberalization preceding the transition to democracy), but it can also strengthen at times of severe restrictions, especially if certain civil society groups can aptly exploit the growth of discontent among the population to gear up social conflict. Similarly, it can escalate or plummet during the phase of consolidation, as the political system normalizes, depending on the interplay between the new government’s capacity to meet the citizens’ demands and civil society’s skills to mobilize support around certain sensitive issues.

As underlined by constructivist theorists, political opportunities are often situational and must therefore be perceived and framed in a creative way in order for civil society groups to gather support. This link between opportunities and perceptions is rather important since it connects the action of civil society organizations with the production of ideas and symbols. In this regard, civil society actors act as producers of social frames (insofar as they interpret the world ‘out there’ and contribute to shaping a collective understanding of certain social phenomena) but are also affected by societal perceptions. Thus, they can be considered as both agents and receivers of collective framing processes affecting society (Benford & Snow, 2000).

Needless to say, societal changes (not only political developments) also affect the growth and internal dynamics of civil society. As remarked by scholars of *new social movements*, for instance, most crosscutting issues mobilizing civil society around the world are the outcome of post-industrial and post-materialist societies as opposed to traditional class-based mobilization (e.g. Inglehart, 1977; Melucci, 1995; Touraine, 1981). Therefore, the level of economic development and societal complexity also affects the civil society arena by modifying its internal equilibrium and by giving rise to new formations cutting across traditional social classes (e.g., single-issue campaigns dealing with the environment, corruption, health, etc.).

The Advent of Democracy and the Evolving Characters of Civil Society in South Africa and Korea

The previous sections discussed the theoretical framework of our analysis. We adopted a spatial approach to civil society (civil society as an arena) and debated the literature on the link between civil society and democracy. Then, we borrowed a few analytical categories from social movement theory in order to identify some additional factors explaining the evolution of civil society during democratization. These include the mobilization of resources; the impact of external factors and political dynamics (the so-called ‘opportunities’); the capacity to frame certain social issues as relevant for the population; and the evolution of society itself, which might help explain the formation of new groups cutting across traditional social classes.

In the next sections, we will describe the evolution of civil society in Korea and South Africa by taking into account the interplay among these complementary theories of collective action.

Civil Society in Transition to Democracy: Leadership, Resources and the Risk of Co-optation

Korea held its first democratic elections in 1987, after over two and a half decades of military rule. South Africa celebrated Nelson Mandela's victory in 1994, putting an end to the most vicious racially-based minority regime of the 20th century, known as apartheid. In both cases, civil society movements were instrumental to bring about political change. In Korea, until the mid-1980s, the civic struggle against military rule was led by the so-called people's movement (*minjung undong danche*), a universe of groups and organizations made up mainly of students, the urban poor, religious leaders, blue collar workers and anti-regime politicians (Kim, 2000). Likewise, South Africa's anti-apartheid movement was initially guided by the trade unions, students' organizations and a number of political groups (directly or indirectly connected with banned political parties).

In both countries, civil society's protests grew in frequency and sheer numbers during the second half of the 1980s, when the authoritarian regimes began to lose their international backing and opened up space for civic action in an attempt to slow down the growth of internal opposition. During this time, a wider variety of groups and organizations started participating in the pro-democracy movements. In Korea, new actors – specifically middle class citizens' organizations – gradually joined in the struggle, finally realizing that economic development and political freedom were two sides of the same coin. In the wake of the democratic transition, this process contributed to reorganize the composition of civil society and its leadership, with the demise of people's movement organizations and the emergence of the so-called citizens' movement organizations (*simin undong danche*), gathering together white collar workers, professionals and intellectuals. In South Africa progressive NGOs, human rights groups, and advocacy organizations mushroomed throughout the country in the late 1980s and joined in the civic struggle against apartheid, thereby strengthening and de-racializing the opposition to apartheid (James & Caliguire, 1996). Most of these organizations had long refrained from taking an overt anti-government stance, although they had been critical of the social and political consequences of apartheid. The bulk of them were led and staffed by white activists, middle-to-upper class intellectuals and professionals, who only turned overtly political in the final years of the liberation struggle.

In Table 1, we list the leading civil society groups in Korea and South Africa before the democratic transition and after the advent of democracy.

Table 1. Leading groups within the civil society arena in Korea and South Africa

	Soon before and during the transition to democracy	After the establishment of democracy
Korea	People's movements: <i>Urban poor, students, blue collar workers, anti-regime politicians, religious groups</i>	Citizens' movements: <i>Professionals, white collar workers, intellectuals</i>
	Citizens' movements: <i>Professionals, white collar workers, intellectuals</i>	New civic movements: <i>Students, middle class, intellectuals</i>
South Africa	Social movements: <i>Trade unions, religious leaders, black activists, students</i>	NGOs and think tanks: <i>White and black analysts</i>
	Large NGOs: <i>Mainly white activists,</i>	New social movements: <i>Rural</i>

	<i>progressive middle-class</i>	<i>poor, township dwellers</i>
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Both in Korea and South Africa, these internally multi-layered civic actors shared the same goals: bring down authoritarian rule and establish multi-party liberal democracy. Arguably, it was the coalescence of these different formations that strengthened the popular resistance to authoritarianism, given that civil society's protests were now cutting across class divides and, at least in South Africa, racial cleavages.

During the transition to democracy, South Africa's civil society arena was probably at its peak in terms of number and diversity of participating organizations (James & Caliguire, 1996). Soon after the first democratic elections, though, a number of ideational, economic and political factors contributed to generating a difficult phase for South African civic life. A first critical element was a general shift in the role of civil society itself, given that the ultimate goal of the anti-apartheid civic movement – namely democracy – had been achieved with the installation of a democratic government. A second element was a rather sudden 'brain drain' as many civic leaders left the civil society arena to take up highly remunerative positions in government or in the private sector (Habib & Taylor, 1999). A further destabilizing factor was a sudden shortage of funds, given that with the establishment of a democratically-elected government many international donors diverted their civil society aid programmes towards bilateral agreements with the executive. In this new environment, large NGOs capable of tendering for projects formulated either by government or international institutions further professionalized their operations (often turning themselves into mere consultancies), while traditional social movements disbanded or were gradually co-opted and smaller organizations with rural constituencies entered a long phase of crisis (which continues until today).

By contrast, the argument that civil society tends to shrink after the transition to democracy following the normalization of the political system (Fish, 1994; Hipsher, 1996) does not apply to Korea, where civil society continued to grow steadily during the process of democratic consolidation opening up new spaces for 'all varieties of social and cultural movements' (Koo, 1993, p. 247). Nevertheless, important changes occurred at the leadership level, where citizens' movement organizations managed to exert a more significant influence. These groups differed from those preceding them (especially from the so-called people's movement) in many regards: identity, vision, strategies, modes of action, and relationship with government. They began to focus on problems such as economic justice, environmental promotion and public transparency and, against the backdrop of a rather corrupt and inefficient political class, citizens' movement organizations took on issues that efficiently represented the demands and interests of most segments of society, regardless of class and political affiliations.

This relevant shift in the *modus operandi* of Korean civil society coincided with the development of a more collaborative attitude towards the government. This new approach began under the Kim Young-sam government (1993-98), which passed a bill to legalize public funding and other benefits for certain types of organizations, and thickened under the two 'progressive' governments of Kim Dae-jung (1998-03) and Roh Moo-hyun (2003-08), who actively sought civic organizations' input in policy making (Kim, 2004; Kim, 2009). If, on the one hand, this has allowed citizens' movement organizations to increase their impact on the policy process, on the other hand, it has also encroached on their traditional independence thereby creating, at least in some instances, a too-close-for-comfort relationship between government and certain civil society organizations. After the entry into force of the Non-Profit Organization Supporting Law in 1999, the reliance of civil society organizations on public funds allocated by government grew steadily, with the risk of turning certain organizations into 'handmaidens' of government, thus resulting in a further weakening of civil society's credibility as a societal watchdog (Kim, 2009, p. 892). As a consequence, in order to regain credibility and strengthen their independence, a few civic organizations have constantly refused to receive any kind of donations from the government, political parties and private corporations.

Overt or covert co-optation has also been a practice in South Africa, as the lack of funding after the advent of institutional democracy shrank the budgets of many associations within civil society, which were forced to modify their activity and scope, with deep consequences for their role in the new democratic system. A case in point is the South African National Civic Organisation, which has increasingly been criticized at different levels for having become a ‘vehicle for local strongmen and their clients’, for working in too close association with ruling parties, and for being dominated by corporate goals (Heller & Ntlokonkulu, 2001, p. 12).

In the late 1990s, most South African NGOs entered into what has been termed a ‘corporatist pact’ with the state, whereby the latter offers financial advantages to organizations accepting to act as government’s partners in delivering services and implementing projects (Russell & Swilling, 2002). At the local level, where the distinction between the ruling party and certain NGOs has traditionally been opaque, the growing dependence of these organizations on state funding has further contributed to various forms of political co-optation of civic representatives (Fioramonti, 2005).

Political Opportunities: Accountability and Socio-Economic Rights

Both Korea and South Africa have adopted policy approaches inspired by the developmental state, thus placing the public sector at the forefront of the country’s economic policy.⁴ Yet, while Korea has managed in a few decades to become a leading powerhouse (Korea officially joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development in 1996), South Africa is still ravaged by sour disparities and inequalities, let alone a rampant social and economic crisis. These different external environments have undoubtedly affected the framing process of civil society actors (that is, the construction of shared understandings of societal problems and the identification of common goals) as well as their capacity to identify specific ‘opportunities’ in the new democratic system in order to galvanize citizens’ mobilization. In Table 2, we summarize the key differences between post-democracy civil society in Korea and South Africa focusing on modes of action, problem framing and external factors pertaining to the political sphere.

In Korea, for instance, while traditional people’s movements resorted to direct confrontation with the government in order to bring about regime change, the post-democracy citizens’ movements have mobilized on single-issue campaigns and made full use of advocacy tools and lobbying practices, thereby adopting a more moderate understanding of civic activism. These new organizations also managed to increase their leadership role within civil society thanks to the deep legitimacy crisis and ineffectiveness of institutional politics. Since political parties proved absolutely unable to fulfil citizens’ expectations, citizens’ movements organizations gradually ‘stepped in’ and proved to be not only efficient problem-solvers by collecting citizens’ demands, but also efficient ‘policy entrepreneurs’ proposing policy reforms and even submitting new bills directly to the National Assembly. This new role, which replaced the conventional ‘transmission belt’ function of traditional mass parties (Shin, 2006), was described by some as a transition from purely civic organizations to ‘pseudo-political parties’ (Cho, 2006, p. 82).

In South Africa, the advent of democracy altered the institutional discourse regarding the role of civil society in the post-apartheid setting. Moreover, the developmental state approach adopted by the South African government resulted in an ambiguous stance towards civil society. For instance, while national government officially declared that civil society would continue to be a crucial ally in the country’s development, it essentially viewed it as an implementing partner to support governmental policies rather than as an independent actor capable of exerting an autonomous influence on policies, let alone criticizing government’s decisions (Lanegrans 1995; Mattes 2002; Bond 2000, 2003).

Unlike in Korea, where the democratic transition exacerbated the weakness of the ruling class, the first years of democracy in South Africa brought about a firm reassertion of institutional politics. The power of the ruling and dominant party (the African National

Congress) was not generally scrutinized during the first years of democracy and its reputation was undisputed. By and large, this situation instilled in both civil society and the general population a fair degree of loyalty to the new ruling class, which resulted in the growth of technical NGOs and think tanks providing advice to government departments while leading to the (initial) marginalization of more radical social movements.

As discussed above, Korea's new civic activism mainly concentrated on social issues and political reforms, which had been traditionally disregarded by political parties and governmental institutions. Under the leadership of three main organizations focusing on participatory democracy, economic justice and environmental responsibility⁵, this renewed phase of participation aimed to show Korean citizens, who were deeply accustomed to authoritarianism, that democracy offered new possibilities to promote their common interests and demand public accountability (Cho, 2000). In this regard, one of the most effective and intriguing initiatives was the so-called 'blacklisting campaign', conducted by the Citizens' Alliance for the 2000 General Election (CAGE), a composite group established by several civil society organizations. This campaign aimed at convincing political parties not to present allegedly corrupt and disqualified candidates in the general elections. Yet, due to the scarce cooperation of politicians, the leading organizations decided to publish a roster of blacklisted candidates, encountering the support of the general public and part of the media. In the end, the initiative was rather successful given that 59 out of the 86 blacklisted candidates were not elected (Kim, 2004; Cho, 2001). In 2004, a second blacklisting campaign – although slightly less successful in attracting citizens' interest and support – nonetheless demonstrated once again the strength of Korean civic organizations and their focus on the country's political accountability (Kim, 2006).

Similarly to Korea, the current South African democracy exhibits a high level of political disillusionment and mistrust in public institutions. After a few years of high expectations and widespread confidence in institutional politics, roughly coinciding with Nelson Mandela's tenure (1994-1999), the post-apartheid system began to reveal inefficiencies and internal power struggles amid persisting social inequalities, growing corruption, and failing socio-economic policies.

In this context, the widening gap between state institutions and most citizens has been affecting the modus operandi and the policy focus of many civil society organizations in the last ten years of democratic consolidation. In addition, the rampant socio-economic crisis of the country (further exacerbated by the social impact of one of the most widespread HIV-AIDS pandemics in the world) has inextricably linked political accountability to socio-economic rights in the eyes of civil society. In the past decade, the civil society arena has therefore been guided by a rights-based approach to socio-economic justice, through the leadership of movements and organizations able to leverage the new democratic dispensation with a view to reclaiming the right of citizens to have their voices heard and their needs fulfilled. Arguably the most well-known example of this new mode of action is represented by the Treatment Action Campaign, the organization advocating for a public programme to treat HIV-AIDS victims and their families, which has been opposing the South African government's denialist and abysmal policies since the late 1990s. Other examples are constituted by the landless people's movements, which have gained some local support in most rural areas, while in urban settings, township dwellers have established 'crisis committees' to counter the privatization of fundamental services, such as water and electricity, or to oppose house evictions for tenants who struggle to pay the rent or who cannot afford the cost of basic services (Desai, 2002). Being more concerned with the substantial and social aspects of a democratic society, these groups have distinguished themselves from a variety of well-funded NGOs that, instead, have specifically stressed the procedural features of liberal democracy and have often refrained from taking direct action against government (Hearn, 2000).

Most of the groups composing these new social movements have practiced forms of active resistance (such as illegal reconnection of services cut off by the local municipality or by the police) and, ironically enough, have been arrested for resorting to the very same instruments

of civil disobedience employed by those who opposed apartheid and whose struggle eventually led to the establishment of liberal democracy.

Table 2. Differences in external factors, modes of action and problem framing after the establishment of democracy

	Korea	South Africa
<i>External factors</i>	Immediate failure of party politics	Initial reassertion of institutional politics
<i>Modes of action</i>	Growth of mobilization and diversification of civic movements	Initial demobilization followed by emergence of new social movements
<i>Problem framing</i>	Public accountability and economic reform	Public accountability and socio-economic rights

Entitlement: The Growth of Rights-Based Activism

The phase of democratic consolidation in Korea and South Africa has provided civil society with new opportunities for mobilization. As a consequence of the inefficiencies of institutional politics, political apathy has been significant in both countries. In Korea, for instance, the turnout at the last elections plummeted from 76% in 1988 to 46% in 2008.⁶ Similarly, the number of South African citizens of voting age who actually voted since the first democratic election has steadily decreased: 85% in 1994, 63% in 1999 and 56% in 2004.⁷ In the last elections in 2009, over 12 million citizens eligible to vote did not do so due to failed registration or plain disinterest in politics.⁸

In both countries, the growing mistrust of public institutions and political parties has somehow galvanized new forms of bottom-up contestation that, coupled with the existence of progressive constitutional rights, has contributed to generating an important sense of entitlement in many citizens. In South Africa, this is probably most evident in the wave of service-delivery protests, which since 2008 have ravaged the country, aptly dubbed by one of the most reputable weekly newspapers as ‘Protest Nation’.⁹ Tired of broken promises and unfulfilled demands, thousands and thousands of rural dwellers have engaged in a series of uprisings to mobilize against the lack of basic services, poor accountability by local government officials, and rampant corruption in the public sector. Without a specific coordinating organization, the service-delivery protests have highlighted the growing mobilization capacity of grassroots groups and their significant interconnectedness across provinces and regions. Similarly, the spontaneous ‘candlelight’ protests that erupted in Korea in 2008 against the import of US beef represented a catalyst of various forms of rights-based activism.¹⁰ Kick-started by school pupils fearing that contaminated beef would be introduced in their school meals, the demonstrations crossed the country for three months, with more than 1700 civic organizations establishing the People’s Conference Against Mad Cow Disease and millions of Koreans taking to the streets to demand that government revise its policy.

Both examples attest to the growth of spontaneous civil society mobilizations based on a new sense of entitlement, which places rights-based activism at the centre of social and political contestation. In this new context, it appears as if citizens have become increasingly capable of

organizing themselves (with a significant degree of autonomy from civic organizations) to reclaim their basic right to be heard by policy makers, that is, to uphold the most fundamental pillar of a democratic society.

Conclusion

As this article has discussed, the phase of democratic consolidation can significantly affect the motives, dynamics and objectives of civil society. In both Korea and South Africa the advent of democracy posed a number of challenges to civil society organizations, mainly because the achievement of their overarching objective – that is, the establishment of democracy – implied a shift in focus and a gradual renovation of civil society's structure, strategies and main actors.

In Korea, the traditional people's movement experienced an erosion of its leadership role within the civil society arena to the advantage of a new *incarnation* of civic organizations, more specifically concerned with *new* issues such as socio-economic rights, political reform, and public accountability. These organizations (also known as citizens' movement organizations) became propellers of change and renovation, taking advantage of the inefficiencies of the political class to mobilize citizens around issues of transparency and accountability. In South Africa, too, the end of apartheid deeply affected civil society organizations mainly due to decreased international funding (which was centralized by the new government), a substantial brain-drain effect, and an immediate reassertion of institutional politics (which resulted in a wait-and-see approach by most civil society actors).

In these two countries, the consolidation of democracy has inevitably changed the nature of government-civil society relations. One important factor has been represented by the overt or covert attempt to co-opt leaders of civic organizations in order to reduce their 'voice' option and to feel less exposed. This is true especially in the case of South Africa where, during the consolidation of democracy, many civil society organizations were faced with decreasing funding, as foreign donors redirected the bulk of their resources to governmental policies. Co-optation attempts could seriously undermine the legitimacy and autonomy of civic organizations, but in many cases a number of organizations decided not to accept any institutionalized support in order to keep their integrity and independence intact.

As highlighted in the analysis, political disillusionment and mistrust of public institutions have grown significantly in the past decade. While in South Africa institutional politics reasserted itself in the first years of democracy, thereby sidelining organizations and movements concerned with public accountability and good governance, in Korea corruption and lack of transparency immediately marred the dawn of democracy, providing civic movements with a fertile terrain to galvanize civic mobilizations vis-à-vis the lack of responsiveness of the political class. In the East Asian country, this trend has been most visible with the blacklisting campaigns, which have clearly signalled the generalized demand for a more accountable and transparent political sphere, while South Africa has been recently ravaged by the eruption of thousands of protests and street marches for effective service delivery and social justice.

Social and economic factors have also played an important role in shaping the civil society arena. In this regard, it is worth underlining that the Korean sustained economic growth and its post-1997 economic policies have allowed civil society organizations to find a strong 'voice', mainly as representative of the middle class. Not only has the Korean economic 'miracle' allowed the country to become one of the richest and most advanced in the world, but it has also favoured various forms of redistribution of wealth and labour rights, thereby allowing civil society to focus more selectively on issues such as political transparency and corruption. In South Africa, by contrast, deep inequalities and socio-economic divides are still preponderant. If, on the one hand, this shrinks the extent and relevance of the middle class, on the other hand, it creates a significant divide between well-resourced NGOs that enjoy quite limited popular support (and often refrain from taking a direct political stance) and widespread grassroots movements with few resources and a strong focus on socio-economic rights, which have

become increasingly vociferous on issues of social justice and have not hesitated to enter the political terrain.

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Endnotes

¹ This article is the outcome of a joint effort by the two authors. In practice, though, Lorenzo Fioramonti wrote the *Introduction*, the subsections *Spatial Definition: Civil Society as an Arena*, *The Civil Society-Democracy Nexus*, *Civil Society in Democratic Consolidation* and all parts regarding South Africa in the section *The Advent of Democracy and the Evolving Characters of Civil Society in Korea and South Africa*. Antonio Fiori has written the subsection *Civil Society and Politics: Some Additional Insights from Social Movement Theory*, the *Conclusion* and all parts regarding Korea in the section *The Advent of Democracy and the Evolving Characters of Civil Society in Korea and South Africa*.

² Allison Van Rooy discusses six 'incarnations' of civil society in current academic and practitioner debate, including civil society as a 'value', 'collective noun', 'space', 'historical moment', 'anti-hegemony', and 'anti-state' (Van Rooy, 1998, p. 6).

³ Like any attempt to encapsulate civil society into a definitional framework, this spatial approach also reveals limitations, which have been aptly debated elsewhere. For example, see the commentaries published in *Journal of Civil Society*, 1(3), 2005.

⁴ Developmental state is a term used in international political economy to describe governments that have adopted policies of direct state intervention in the national economy to sustain economic growth and provide extensive regulation and planning.

⁵ These organizations were: the People's Solidarity for Participatory Democracy (PSPD), the Citizen's Coalition for Economic Justice (CCEJ), and the Korean Federation of Environmental Movements (KFEM).

⁶ International IDEA, Voter Turnout per Country (Korea). Accessed March 15, 2010 at <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?id=122>.

⁷ International IDEA, Voter Turnout per Country (South Africa). Accessed March 15, 2010 at <http://www.idea.int/vt/countryview.cfm?country=ZA>.

⁸ See the election results published by the Electoral Institute of Southern Africa. Accessed March 15, 2010 at <http://www.eisa.org.za/WEP/sou2009results1.htm>.

⁹ See the front page of the *Mail & Guardian* of 31st of July 2009.

¹⁰ In 2003 the Korean government decided to ban imports of US beef after a case of bovine spongiform encephalopathy (commonly known as mad-cow disease) was discovered in Washington. Periodic attempts at lifting the ban have been made in the following years, but they have all failed due to violations found during inspections. However, President Lee Myung-bak, who took office in February 2008, decided to re-open imports of US beef, triggering popular protests throughout the country.