Civil Society in the Consolidation Process
Illustrations from Central America

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Introduction

In the aftermath of the third wave of democratization, the sub discipline of consolidology has grown remarkably. Empirical democratic theory no longer focuses on the formal transition to democracy, but rather on how post-transition democracies can become consolidated democracies. Scholars, as well as policy-makers have recently acknowledged the importance of informal institutions and procedures for democratic consolidation. In order to understand the problems of post-transition democracies it is necessary to change focus, from analyzing the establishment of formal institutions to analyzing the development of the informal institutions of the consolidation process.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the role of civil society in the process of democratic consolidation. It is also an attempt to confront some of the hypothesis derived from the theoretical part with empirical findings. The empirical cases Guatemala and Honduras both went through democratization in terms of establishment of formal democratic procedures and institutions during the 1980s. Yet, democracy is far from consolidated.

Implicitly, there seems to be a wish for simple linear models of explanation within the consolidation studies, but the literature lacks theoretical models, as well as empirical evidence. Therefore, it is argued in the paper, we avoid simple linear explaining models and rather analyze democratic consolidation from a process perspective. Consolidation is thus perceived as a constantly ongoing process. This process is not linear, nor is it irreversible. A consolidated democracy is nothing but an ideal type. Depending on what stage of the consolidation process we enter in our study we focus on different factors. If our empirical cases are formally democratic in terms of formal institutions and procedures, it seems reasonable to put emphasis on the informal institutions such as the civil society.

The model of analysis presented in this paper takes its starting point in the path dependency tradition. It is argued that the degree of pluralism accepted by the authoritarian regime determines the prospects for successful democratic
consolidation, as it sets the conditions for a civil society to grow. It is however not the existence of civil society per se that is interesting in this model of analysis but rather civil society as source of change. In this paper I focus on three changes: the development of a democratic political culture (or, a civic society), the strengthening of the political society, and the poverty reduction.

The first part of the paper is a discussion of the role of the informal institutions in the process of democratic consolidation. It starts with a discussion of how democratic consolidation is conceptualized in the literature and different ways of approaching it. We then turn to the role of civil society in the consolidation process. In the second part of the paper the model of analysis is illustrated with two empirical cases—Guatemala and Honduras.

**Conceptualizing Democratic Consolidation**

Even though it has been the main focus for empirical democratic theory lately, the concept of democratic consolidation certainly leaves us with a lot to wish for. Gunther, Diamandouros and Puhle argue that the reason why consolidology is problematic is that scholars use different definitions (1995:5). In my opinion, however, there is a strong tendency to adhere to the well known “only game in town-definition” (Linz 1990, see also Linz & Stepan 1996a; 1996b).

The “only game in town-definition” has an attitudinal, behavioral and constitutional dimension. The only game in town-definition has, in my opinion, the advantage of

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1 “[a consolidated democracy] is one in which none of the major political actors, parties or organized interests, forces, or institutions consider that there is any alternative to democratic processes to gain power, and that no political institution or group has a claim to veto the action of democratically elected decision makers. This does not mean that there are no minorities ready to challenge and question the legitimacy of the democratic process by non-democratic means. It means, however, that the major actors do not turn to them and they remain politically isolated. To put it simply, democracy must be seen as “the only game in town” (Linz 1990:158).

2 Democracy must be seen as “the only game in town” in attitudes, in behavior and in the constitution to be consolidated. Democracy is the only game in town attitudinally when a majority of the population considers democracy to be the best political system to be ruled by, even in times when the performance of the government is low; behaviorally when no major important political actor tries to overthrow the democratically elected government, and the government does not have to devote all resources to fight non democratic groups, and;
being non-ethnocentric. It puts emphasis on the subjective legitimacy rather than an objective legitimacy, i.e. it measures whether the democratic system is legitimate among the population, not whether it contains a set of Western institutions or not. As a minimalist definition it has the advantage of being able to travel between different cultural contexts, without being subject to severe conceptual stretching (Sartori 1970).

Even though most scholars seem to agree on the definition, they are actually referring to different empirical phenomena and this gives rise to what Schedler refers to as an “unclear, inconsistent and unbounded concept [...]” (Schedler 1998a:92). According to Schedler this conceptual mess can be explained by the different empirical contexts that we are working in. Whereas some work in liberal democracies, others work in pseudo democracies. Against the empirical background, scholars focus either on democratic survival or democratic progress. The original meaning of democratic consolidation was avoiding democratic breakdown, but recently it has come to involve other things such as development of a democratic culture (Schedler 1998a:103-104). Today, five different notions of democratic consolidation are to be found within the consolidation literature.3

The solution to the conceptual mess is to use a four-fold classification of regime types—authoritarianism, electoral democracy, liberal democracy and advanced democracy— which serves as a conceptual map for consolidation studies. Scholars that are working in electoral democracies are probably concerned with democratic stability in terms of avoiding democratic breakdown and therefore have a negative notion of democratic consolidation. Those that work in liberal democracies, on the other hand, are concerned with democratic progress in terms of deepening of democracy and, hence, have a positive notion of democratic consolidation. In short, the positive notion of consolidation is to “reach the goal of democratic continuity”; the negative idea is to move “beyond democratic fragility” (Schedler 1998a:94-95; 1997:10).

3Avoiding democratic breakdown, avoiding democratic erosion, institutionalizing democracy, completing democracy, and deepening democracy.
As most Latin American countries have formally democratic political systems I find the positive notion of democracy to be the most fruitful approach. There is always a risk of regression back to authoritarian rule, but as in the cases of Guatemala and Honduras, it is not the military’s political ambitions *per se* that constitutes the real perils of democratic breakdown. It is rather the anti-democratic forces in combination with a lack of a democratic political culture and a strong civil society. Therefore, democratic deepening in terms of development of a civil society and a democratic political culture seems to be the most fruitful approach.

**Analyzing Democratic Consolidation**

Another weakness of consolidology concerns the ambiguity inherent in the scholarly tradition over which scientific tradition to adhere to. Implicitly, the language used indicates a predilection for explanatory models with single linear causality. It is, for example, often argued that a democracy cannot be consolidated without a democratic civil society and a democratic political culture. There are, however, few attempts to explain how and why these factors are important. Karvonen correctly points out that there is no systematic *empirical* evidence of the influence of civil society on democratization (Karvonen 1997:93;96). This can partly be explained by the disagreement over what is actually being defined as consolidation; explaining variables are naturally dependent on the notion of consolidation referred to.

It is however questionable whether it is at all possible to analyze consolidation in terms of dependent and independent variables. It is in my opinion more fruitful to use a process perspective, and depending on where in the process we enter we focus on different factors. But, even though we depart from a process perspective we might still have an idea of what facilitates or impedes democratic consolidation. Based upon the idea of path dependency, it is here assumed that the character of prior regime has implications for the prospects of successful consolidation. Or, to put it in another way; the degree of pluralism accepted by the authoritarian regime is a

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4 There are however some scholars who argue that the most urgent threat to democracy in Guatemala and Honduras is a military coup (see Karl 1996:34-35; Linz & Stepan 1996:xiii;
decisive factor for democratic consolidation, as it sets the conditions for the growth of a civil society and, thereby the development of a democratic culture.

It should be emphasized here that this is not a model of simple linear causality, something that will be elaborated below. Other related explanations are the duration of the authoritarianism, i.e. if there is a prior experience of democracy, and the relative harshness of the authoritarian regime against the population. Finally, the character of the transition is also seen as an explanatory variable (see Gunther, Diamandourous & Puhle 1995; Linz & Stepan 1996a; Schmitter 1995).

In this study democratic consolidation is conceptualized as a process, analytically separated from the transition process.5 The process of consolidation is not a just a prolongation of the transition process; and it engages “different actors, behaviors, processes, values and resources” (Schmitter 1995:12), and is associated with different explanatory variables (Gunther, Diamandourous & Puhle 1995:3). But even though transition and consolidation are conceptually distinct processes, they may overlap temporally (Gunther, Diamandouros & Puhle 1995:3; Plasser; Ulram & Waldrauch 1998:10). This distinction requires that we use a minimalist definition of democracy.

Consolidation is thus both a process and a state of being, and this gives rise to the teleological character of the concept (Schedler 1997; O’Donnell 1996). One solution is to treat the final destination as an ideal type and concentrate on the process. Or, as Gunther, Diamandouros and Puhle put it; “[...] by clearly separating the ultimate long-term product of consolidation (regime sustainability) from the concept of consolidation itself (which focus on the extent of attitudinal support for the key representative institutions of the democratic regime and respect for its specific rules of the game) [...]” (Gunther, Diamandourous & Puhle 1995:13).

The process of consolidation can be analyzed from an active or from an evolutionary perspective. From the evolutionary perspective consolidation is seen as an

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5 Transition is the “interval between one political regime and another” (O’Donnell & Schmitter 1986:6-7). The transition contains two processes: the liberalization when civil rights are being redefined and extended, and the democratization when democratic institutions and procedures are being established (Linz & Stepan 1996a:3).
adaptation process in which politicians and citizens learn to act according to democratic rules, norms and procedures. It puts emphasis on the gradual change of values that takes place, such as the development of values like trust (see e.g. Fukuyama 1995a) and a civic culture. The active perspective puts emphasis on the active creation of institutions such as, the establishment of democratic institutions or the elimination of authoritarian institutions (Plasser, Ulram & Waldrauch 1998:12-16).

In my opinion the active perspective is most convenient for analysis of the negative notion of democratic consolidation (or perhaps, most suitable for transition studies), whereas the evolutionary perspective serves as a better tool for analyzing the positive notion of democratic consolidation, especially deepening of democracy. The evolutionary perspective demonstrates the urgent need for an integration of cultural theory to consolidation theory. Fukuyama did elaborate this relation in an article, in which he emphasized the problem of the cultural lag. Democratic consolidation must take place at four different levels: the ideological, the institutional, the civil societal and the cultural level. The civil societal and cultural levels are most slow to change, and these levels therefore constitute the real obstacle for democratic consolidation. The cultural level, consisting of fundamental deep-rooted values such as religious beliefs and moral systems, is decisive for the other levels (Fukuyama 1995b).

Another aspect of democratic consolidation is whether masses or elites should be in focus. Transitology, traditionally, focused on elite pacts, elite negotiations, elite decisions etc. Among scholars concerned with democratic consolidation, only Gunther and Higley analyze consolidation from a strictly elite-centered perspective (1992). I would however argue that an exclusive elite-centered approach is insufficient when analyzing the positive notion of democratic consolidation, from an evolutionary perspective. But, in order to get the whole picture, both elites and masses should be taken into consideration (cf. Plasser, Ulram & Waldrauch 1998; Gunther, Diamandourous & Puhle 1995; Doh Chull Shin 1994).

Finally, a note on how democratic consolidation can be analyzed. Scholars concerned with consolidation either look back in order to explain the stability of historical cases, or look forward in order to say something about the future prospects of stability. The
forward-looking perspective, inevitable implies hypothetical reasoning rather than fact finding. This is however not a problem according to Schedler, as all social sciences are probabilistic rather than deterministic. The problem with future-consolidology is what he calls “double probabilism.” This means that neither causes, nor effects are certain (Schedler 1998b).

Civil Society in the Consolidation Process

The concept of civil society, as it is defined within empirical democratic theory today, is based upon two different perspectives — the majority democracy perspective and the liberal perspective. The civic virtue tradition, expressed for example by Rousseau and based upon the idea of the common will, has been brought together with the liberal perspective, expressed in the Scottish enlightenment philosophy. These two theoretical traditions emphasize different aspects of civil society. Whereas the majoritarian perspective emphasizes the idea of a civic citizen, the liberal perspective focuses on civil society as a countervailing power that limits state power.

This mix of two different traditions is not necessarily a problem, as long as we are aware about the double character of civil society. The concept of civil society should therefore be analyzed as containing two parts— the tangible organizations between the public and the private sphere (civil society in the liberal sense) and the intangible institutions such as values and norms (civic society in the majority democracy sense).

These two “parts” of civil society should be analyzed in relation to each other, as mutually dependent, but as analytically separate units. Based on the work of Fukuyama, I would also suggest that the civil society and the civic society are two different levels of analysis. Civic society is what is commonly referred to as a democratic political culture and hence on a higher level of abstraction than the tangible organizations that make up the civil society. Civil society and civic society are mutually reinforcing; by participation in civil society a change of value might take place and citizen values may become more civic, more democratic, more tolerant etc. This change of values, in turn, facilitates interaction in civil society and contributes to a more widespread participation.
Civil society, it is argued in the literature, plays a crucial role for successful transition as well as for democratic consolidation. But the character of civil society is different during the transition compared to the consolidation phase. It is necessary to acknowledge these two different roles in order to avoid conceptual confusion. During the democratic transition civil society is perceived as being active in the process of replacing the authoritarian government. Civil society is united as it focuses on a common goal whereas during a consolidation phase civil society is more differentiated. The units of civil society have different, sometimes competing, goals which gives rise to competition. Once the authoritarian regime is replaced, participation may seem less important to ordinary citizens, and therefore participation may decline (Boussard 1998).

Related to these ideas but expressed in a somewhat different way is Foley and Edwards’ “two versions of civil society”. The first version is the civil society that fosters “patterns of civility in the actions of citizens in a democratic polity” (civil society I). The second version is the civil society that is independent of the state and a source of resistance towards the existing (civil society II). Whereas civil society I has positive implications for democratic governance, civil society II is a counterweight to the state (democratic as well as authoritarian). Hence we have civil society I that supports the existing regime by contributing to civil values, and we have civil society II that is a counterweight to existing regime and may bring about the fall of that regime (Foley & Edwards 1996).

This discussion is related to the two different perspectives inherent in the concept of civil society. But it also has implications for the discussion of different conceptualizations of civil society during the different stages of democratization. It calls for a more flexible approach to civil society; how civil society is conceptualized depends on what part of the democratization process that is in focus for the analysis (i.e. the positive or negative notion of consolidation).

Accordingly, a competitive civil society with declining participation should be interpreted as a sign of consolidation. I would therefore argue that this transformation of civil society is part of the consolidation process— an over-active civil society could actually be a threat to a new democracy (Whitehead 1997; White
A post-transition democracy is normally vulnerable for the demands of the previously repressed masses’ demands. Hence, a decline of participation (or at least, a decline of the very intense participation) and a differentiation of civil society is a normalization of civil society in the consolidation phase.

**Civil society as a source of change**

It is not civil society *per se* that explains democratic consolidation but the various changes that it can give rise to. Civil society can contribute to democratic consolidation by developing a democratic participant political culture, by strengthening political society and by reducing poverty.

By participation in civil society organizations citizens may learn democratic principles practiced within the organization and thereby understand the principles for democratic governance, and adopt democratic norms and values such as tolerance and trust. This way of arguing is however based upon the assumption that the organizations are at least somewhat democratic and allow for equal citizen participation. And this is basically a question of whether we define civil society as democratic or not. So far, this question has been more or less neglected within empirical democratic theory. One exception to this pattern is Larry Diamond (1994) who has explicitly stated that the organizations must be internally democratic.

The main reason for why the internal structures should be taken into consideration is because it is hard to imagine how participation in authoritarian organizations could democratize the political culture. In order for a civic society to develop, the organizations must be somewhat democratic, or participation will seem meaningless to the citizens and it is questionable whether a tradition of participation will evolve. Hence, in the context of democratic consolidation only democratic organizations are of interest. A definition containing only strictly democratic organizations with horizontal relations can however lead us into tautological problems. But, to make some sense of civil society’s role in the consolidation process we can at least argue that the more democratic the units of civil society are, the greater the chances that democracy will be consolidated.
Another related question is whether all kinds of organizations contribute to democratization of the political culture or development of a civic society to the same extent. Basically, it concerns the difference between organizations with a broader societal interest such as human rights or citizen participation, and “recreational” organizations such as bowling leagues. The first kinds of organizations can better explain citizen participation, theoretically as well as empirically, than the latter. This hypothesis has been tested by Amber Seligson, who examined Putnam’s thesis in Central America and her conclusion was that only participation in community development groups affects democracy (measured as demand-making). By unpacking Putnam’s independent variable she could conclude that participation in other kinds of organizations had no effect on democracy (Seligson 1999).

I do not argue that these kinds of organizations are irrelevant for democracy or democratic consolidation. I believe that they are excellent sources for the growth of interpersonal trust for example. But it is questionable if they generate institutional trust or a tradition of participation in the democratic process.

Civil society can also be an important factor in the consolidation process by strengthening the political society. Civil society can educate citizens of what they can expect from political institutions, but also, what is expected from them as citizens. By cooperating with political institutions such as political parties civil society may give them some legitimacy. And, finally, civil society can strengthen the political society by generating a new democratic leadership. The idea of a civil society that strengthens the political society, however, requires us to abandon the traditional way of looking at civil society and political society as two strictly separated units. We should rather focus on the interaction between those.

For example, political parties and civil society organizations are often ascribed the same role: to educate and mobilize citizens, to serve as channels for communication, to formulate demands, and to train future leaders (see e.g. Diamond 1994). When political parties do not work satisfactory, organizations may play their role and the

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6 Putnam makes no distinction between different kinds of organizations. A bird watching club can explain civicness in the same way as civic a community group (Putnam 1993).
7 Both the pluralist and the educational function (see Hadenius & Uggla 1995).
other way around. The role that civil society will play “depends crucially on the larger political setting” (Foley & Edwards 1996:48)

Finally, I argue that civil society can contribute to democratic consolidation by reducing poverty that today excludes a majority of the population in newly democratized states from participation in the democratic process. Civil society can reduce poverty by managing small-scale projects aiming at self-development that targets the poorest. Small development projects are likely to reach the most needing areas, and they also have reputation of being less corrupt and more transparent compared to large development project managed by state institutions. NGOs are also said to be flexible, non-bureaucratic, innovative, participatory, have field presence and good contacts with locals (Burnell 1997:176-177). There is, naturally, those who contradict this, and there is obviously a danger in romanticizing NGOs (cf. Macdonald 1997). Civil society can also contribute to poverty reduction, by putting the issue of poverty on the political agenda and thereby forcing political parties to address the question. And, finally, civil society act as a watch-dog making sure that the foreign aid is not ending up in the wrong places.

Comparing Guatemala and Honduras

Against the theoretical background Guatemala and Honduras were selected because of their historical past. These countries have a somewhat similar history; since independence from Spain, Guatemala and Honduras have been ruled by different military or right wing authoritarian regimes. Both countries also experienced an era of democratization and social reforms during the 1950s. This democratic period would however not last for long – the reforms threatened the land-owning oligarchy and its traditional ally the military, and both countries returned to authoritarian rule that lasted until the 1980s.

The transition processes that were initiated by the authoritarian governments in the early 1980s can be explained by more or less the same set of factors: external pressure, internal economic crisis, a declining legitimacy for the governing elite, and
an internal divide within the authoritarian government. The transitions did, however, not immediately result in a liberal democracy. Elections were held regularly but there were still restrictions on the constitutional rights in Guatemala, and the military continued to be a major actor in Honduran politics. However, recent changes such as the signing of the peace accords in Guatemala in December 1996 and the constitutional changes in the beginning of the 1990s in Honduras completed the transition. With a minimalist democratic definition Guatemala and Honduras are democracies with working democratic procedures and institutions (Solis 1997).

Guatemala and Honduras have followed a similar path, but there are differences that call for a comparative analysis. In Honduras the authoritarian regimes left some space for popular participation and a civil society to grow. There is also a tradition of relatively active trade unions. The regime in Guatemala was much harsher against the population, as the counter-insurgency war targeted mainly the civilian population, especially the rural Mayan population. The two cases have disparate experiences of pluralism during pre-democratic times and therefore, against the theoretical background, they were selected as cases. One working hypothesis is that Honduras has better conditions for developing a civil society, compared to Guatemala. Even though the formal transition to democracy in Guatemala took place only four years after Honduras, it was a more complicated transition and some of the non-democratic institutions, such as the civilian self-defense patrols (PACs), did not disappear until the implementation of the peace agreement from 1996.

Civil Society in Guatemala and Honduras

This part of the paper is principally based upon interviews made with civil society representatives or people working with issues related to democracy in Guatemala and Honduras.⁹

An increasing activity is taking place within the Guatemalan civil society. This recent activity can be explained by a consensus concerning the necessity to change the

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⁹ I want to protect the anonymity of the respondents.
Guatemalan society (interview A). Guatemala has been involved in a double transition– the peace process and the democratization process. The democratization process was activated by the coup staged by president Serrano in 1993. Civil society, then, united against Serrano’s attempt to return to authoritarianism and was a major force in the return to constitutionalism. After the coup, civil society representatives got together in Instancia Nacional de Consenso and Foro Multisectoral. From January 1994 the Asamblea de la Sociedad Civil took an active part in the peace negotiations (Jonas 1995:35).

Civil society in Guatemala began to grow in the early 1980s but has been characterized by a widespread fear, low participation, and repression against it. The Guatemalan civil society has some resemblance to the Salvadoran civil society. The Salvadorans have, however, been more open and expressed themselves to a higher extent compared to the Guatemalans who have remained silent. It is the silence that restricts the growth of civil society in Guatemala (interview C).

The Guatemalan civil society has had some problems with redefining its new role in a democratic system. Civil society had a special role as the democratic opposition during the war. Today the organizations have to redefine their role and cooperate and compromise with their former enemy— the state. Many organizations are however unwilling to redefine their role, and not willing to change their policy. There are of course exceptions to this pattern (informal communication).

The hurricane Mitch that reached Honduras in October 1998 activated the Honduran civil society. Civil society came to serve as an important actor for receiving and distributing the foreign aid that is flowing into the country after Mitch, and people seems to agree that civil society came to be a central actor in the reconstruction process. The hurricane also had another effect— when civil society was confronted with a strong common enemy the organizations were able to unite and work together

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10 Civil society also had an important role during the war as the major receiver of foreign aid. Most part of the foreign aid was distributed via civil society organizations, as most donor countries would not give aid as long as the abuses against human rights went on.

11 Both outside experts and representatives of civil society ascribed civil society a very important role in the reconstruction process.
in the reconstruction of the country. Organizations formed various “foros” such as Interforos, and Foro Ciudadano who wrote a document for the reconstruction process.\footnote{The document “El Mitch y la construcción democrática en Honduras: riesgos y perspectivas” (1999) also discussed the structural changes that are needed in Honduras.}

The reconstruction process after Mitch demonstrated the problems with a centralized state, but it also showed how strong and flexible the Honduran civil society could be. Civil society has been much more present and active compared to political institutions in the reconstruction process. Mitch created a climate with more respect for civil society (interview b). The government opened up for the ideas put forward by the civil society, and allowed the organizations to participate in the reconstruction process (interview c). The civil society is represented in the reconstruction process by the Comisión de participación de la sociedad civil para la reconstrucción y transformación nacional. The general idea behind the civil society representation is to make the process transparent.

But there are problems within the Honduran civil society as well. In 1999 an intense debate concerning the role of civil society took place in Honduras. A journalist criticized NGOs and accused them of being “pulperías”, small profit-seeking stores, that tried to make money of the foreign aid that is flowing into the country. It was argued that the organizations were not transparent and honest, and that they could not account for the foreign aid that they had received. Finally, leaders of NGOs were accused for inappropriate behavior (La Tribuna March 28, 1999). Competition for financial support is a common feature of the Honduran civil society, and there are problems of cooperation between civil society organizations (Isaksson 1999; informal communication).

It is my impression that the Guatemalan civil society is still united against the state, which they perceive to be an enemy or threat. Civil society here still acts as a united countervailing power against the state, which is perceived as their major antagonist. The coup 1993 showed that democracy is far from secured and the counter-
insurgency institutions, which mainly targeted civilian population during the war, contributed to the perception of the state as the enemy. 13

Civil society in Honduras has a more cooperative attitude towards the state (Isaksson 1999; interview d). It is also my impression that the Honduran civil society is not as united as civil society in Guatemala. At this initial stage of the work, it is my impression that civil society in Honduras is rather divided in the sense that it has not a common objective. This could be interpreted as support for the hypothesis that the change of civil society, from being united for a common objective to being an arena for pluralism and competition, is part of the consolidation process.

Civil society in Guatemala is not, as I know of, criticized as in Honduras but rather seen as the principal promoter for democracy. One tentative conclusion, therefore, is that that the fragility of the Guatemalan democracy makes civil society united and active. Even though organizations in Guatemala may be very different they are united in the struggle for democracy (interview D). The character of the Guatemalan civil society is more of a transition civil society than a consolidation civil society.

Participation in general is low. A common feature of civil society participation in Guatemala and Honduras is that the participation seems to be an elite phenomenon. In organizations working with issues related to citizen participation, human rights etc., most participants seem to be educated, and rather wealthy, and not representative for the larger population. I interpret this as civil society in Guatemala and Honduras not yet has reached the masses.

It should be emphasized that the illustrations are based on rather weak material. But it still seems reasonably to assume that the silence and fear in Guatemala, that one respondent refers to, is a result of the insecurity citizens were exposed to during authoritarian rule. The regime left no space for popular participation. The Honduran civil society is different in this regard, it seems to have a more cooperative stance towards the state, and does not perceive it as an enemy as in Guatemala.

13 It should be emphasized that even though the Guatemalan civil society is united in one sense, it is at the same time divided by the same cleavage that characterizes the whole Guatemalan society, and that is the indígena – ladino divide.
However, during the post-Mitch period, there have been some problems in the relations between the state and the civil society. The government argued that they got civil society feedback from the *Foro de Convergencia Nacional* (FONAC). But FONAC, it has been argued, is only a rubberstamp for government policies (Jeffery 1999). It could also be argued that FONAC is not a true civil society association, but rather a governmental creation as a response to the donor society’s demands for civil society participation. Furthermore, some organizations have reacted negatively on what they perceived as ignorance from the government. This recent development could be interpreted as after civil society was united by Mitch, the relations the to the state became problematic.

**Towards Democratic Consolidation?**

As newly democratized states Guatemala and Honduras are confronted with a similar set of problems. The democratic culture is weak—Guatemalans and Hondurans have little trust for fellow citizens, for democratic institutions and procedures, for politicians, and for the politicians’ ability to solve the problems of the country. An authoritarian tradition has left deep marks in the culture (see e.g. Lagos 1997; Karl 1995; Sieder 1996).

The absence of a democratic political culture is related to the weak political society and the widespread poverty. Political parties without internal democracy, and absence of serious debate cannot generate satisfaction for democracy or trust in political institutions. The foreign debt affects participation negatively as it obstructs investment in social development, such as education (interview d). Furthermore, the widespread poverty implies exclusion of the poor population from participating in the democratic process, and as long as a majority of the population is excluded from politics, democracy as a political system will not become legitimate. These threats to democratic consolidation are mutually reinforcing, and create vicious circles. But, the solution may be found in a strong civil society.

*Civil Society and Civic Culture*
It is very hard to measure democratic consolidation in terms of democratic culture. Most studies of attitudes toward democracy are examined by surveys. There are however several problems attached to this method and one concerns the use of figures at an absolute scale.\textsuperscript{14} Surveys such as the Latinobarómetro are, hence, only relevant at a relative scale, for regional comparisons.

According to the Latinobarómetro, there is generally little enthusiasm for democracy in Central America. For example, only 51\% of the citizens of Guatemala find democracy preferable to some other kind of government. The Hondurans’ support for democracy is the lowest in Latin America– only 42\% find democracy preferable to other political systems. Generally, most people believe that no matter how they vote things are not going to change for the better. They also believe that politicians do not engage in the issues that the citizens are interested in, and that they have no solutions to the problems of the countries. The figures are generally lower in Honduras.

Also the levels of institutional trust are low.\textsuperscript{15} Almost half the population in Guatemala and Honduras believes that elections are dishonest and the levels of trust for political parties are low as well. The Catholic Church is one of the few institutions that people do have trust in.\textsuperscript{16} Of all the institutions examined, except the Church, Honduras has higher levels of distrust compared to Guatemala. Interpersonal trust is low as well.\textsuperscript{17} Generally, Central Americans do not believe that their fellow citizens are honest and obey laws. Interest for and participation in politics is generally low; more than half of the population in Guatemala and Honduras never follow politics or discuss politics with friends. Most people never or almost never work for something that concerns themselves or their neighborhood. Also participation in demonstrations and in voluntary organizations is low.

\textsuperscript{14} For example, a recent opinion poll in Sweden revealed high levels of distrust for politicians, still we don’t question the level of democratic consolidation in Sweden, but when we see the same low figures from Central America we quickly state that the prospects for democratic consolidation are low. Therefore, surveys as the Latinobarómetro are only useful on a relative scale, not at an absolute.
\textsuperscript{15} The institutions measured in the Latinobarómetro are for example: legislative institutions, police, political parties, judicial powers, and executive institutions.
\textsuperscript{16} 46\% in Guatemala and 69\% in Honduras.
\textsuperscript{17} 66\% of the Guatemalans and 73\% of the Hondurans do not have trust in other.
From this we could conclude that civil society in Honduras and Guatemala is not very successful in democratizing the political culture or developing a civic society. But we can find other possible explanations for this trend. Normally it is assumed that it will take generations to change cultural patterns.\textsuperscript{18} Only twenty years have passed since the third wave of democratization reached Central America, and it might be too early to expect democracy to be “the only game in town”.

Another possible explanation is lack of internal democracy. As it has been argued, the mutually reinforcing relation between participation in civil society and the development of a civic society is based on the assumption that the organizations of civil society are democratic. It is very hard to make a general statement of the internal level of democracy in civil society in those two countries. According to one respondent, most organizations in Guatemala are not internally democratic structured. Most Guatemalans participate in religious networks and organizations rather than in profane organizations. Church-related organizations are traditionally hierarchical to its character. But there are exceptions—Maya organizations are ruled by the principle of consensus. The level of democracy can however be questioned, as most women probably do not attend the meetings. There are however some indigenous organizations that have a female democratic leadership, as for example CONAVIGUA\textsuperscript{19}(interview A).

The same can be said for Honduran organizations. The vertical structures in the society deeply affect participation and the internal structures of the organizations. The organizational culture is a reflection of the political culture (interview e). Many organizations are undemocratic, and all levels in society are characterized by paternalism and verticalism (interview f). Corrupt organizations can be explained by the corrupt Honduran society— it is not a specific civil society problem. We should however keep in mind that the external aid that is flowing into the country after Mitch contributes to the corruption in local civil society. Another observation is that the organizations in both countries are controlled from above, with strong

\textsuperscript{18} See e.g. Fukuyama 1995b.  
\textsuperscript{19} Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (CONAVIGUA) is an organization of Mayan women who have lost their husbands in the political violence.
charismatic leaders, often well educated that don’t have very much in common with the majority of Central Americans.

Civil Society and Political Society

Guatemala and Honduras have weak political parties. In Honduras the tendency to a bipartisan system is strong; the Liberal and the National party together hold about 95% of the votes. There is almost no difference between the parties in terms of ideology, and therefore an absence of political debate. Traditional rural caudillismo has a strong hold over the parties, and the level of internal democracy is low. The traditional parties do not generate new ideas or policies. Political parties, therefore, have a low legitimacy in Honduras. A study showed that people found the NGOs to be most engaged in the reconstruction process after Mitch. This could be interpreted as a sign of traditional parties loosing ground and civil society organizations are taking their place. The political parties in Honduras represent the system rather than society, and the main opposition comes from civil society, not the party in opposition (interview b).

Whereas Honduras is characterized by bipartisanism, continuity and traditional politics Guatemala has a rapidly changing multi-party system with about twenty registered political parties. No party has ever won the national elections twice, and this naturally contributes to the discontinuity that characterizes Guatemalan politics. The victory of FRG in the latest election also raises questions concerning democratic consolidation. There is reason to believe that the political parties in Guatemala suffer as much as the Honduran parties from undemocratic internal structures.

Generally, Guatemalans and Hondurans have little trust in political parties and politicians. The political parties do not work satisfactorily, as they should in a consolidated democracy. This development is a vicious circle; low legitimacy further contributes to a declining participation in elections, and political parties become even

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20 For example, during the last months the political debate in Honduras was focused on Ricardo Maduro’s nationality (one of Partido Nacional’s presidential candidates).
21 Both Partido Liberal de Honduras and Partido Nacional de Honduras have recently democratized their internal elections. PLH has however gone further in the democratization process than PNH (Salomón 1998:21-24). The undemocratic internal structures also affect the conditions for female participation negatively (interview g).
22 Frente Republicano Guatemala is former dictator Efraín Ríos-Montt’s party.
more distant from the citizens. Theoretically, civil society could perform some of the parties’ tasks, by representing and pursuing the interest of the citizens, mobilize and educate citizens, serve as think-tanks, and generate a new generation of democratic politicians. But even though civil society could perform some of the parties’ tasks, it cannot replace political society, as both are necessary components in a consolidated democracy (Cf. Linz & Stepan 1996a). But, the existence of a strong civil society could break the vicious circle by generating a new, democratic political leadership, as well as a tradition of civic participation.

Civil society has played an important role in the process of democratic consolidation by strengthening the political society. For example, several organizations work information campaigns in order to educate citizens of their political and civil rights, how the legislative process works, how a citizen can contact politicians etc. Another way that civil society (in Guatemala as well as in Honduras) has contributed to the strengthening of political society is by cooperating with the government concerning important issues, such as the peace process and the implementation of the peace agreement in Guatemala, and in the national reconstruction and transformation after Mitch in Honduras. This, I believe, has been an important factor for the legitimacy of the political society.

Finally, a new political leadership has evolved out of civil society. In Honduras the former president of codeh, Ramón Custodio, is participating in the upcoming elections as a presidential candidate for PUEBLOH (Movimiento Independiente Pueble Unido en Bloque para Honduras). In Guatemala the former guerrilla movement URNG has now transformed itself into a political party and participates in the electoral process. Even though the new political leadership from URNG is not from a traditional civil society organization, it at least represents a leadership with another background than the traditional political elite.

23 For example, CIPRODEH has a program for citizen participation in which they try to educate citizens in how the democratic process works, and how citizens can get in contact with the members of the Congress.
24 Comité para Defensa de los Derechos Humanos en Honduras.
**Civil Society and Poverty**

Guatemala and Honduras are poor countries. While Honduras is the poorer of the two, both suffer from extreme inequality. As long as a majority lives in poverty democracy can never become consolidated, as equal participation remains impossible. Another aspect of the poverty is the level of education—high levels of illiteracy, citizens cannot participate in elections in a righteous way. The poverty problem is related to the low legitimacy for political parties. It is hard for political parties to gain legitimacy from a population who lives in poverty and misery when they, once in government position, pay interest of the foreign debt instead of investing in social projects that the countries desperately need (interview d).

Civil society is doing a lot to reduce poverty in these countries. There are a great number of organizations working with various projects such as micro credits and self-development projects that receive a considerable amount of foreign aid. Furthermore, organizations such as the Jubilee 2000, can reduce poverty by putting the issue of poverty and foreign debt on the agenda. Civil society can further contribute to increase the legitimacy for political parties by spreading information about the conditions for repaying the foreign debt. When Honduras now is becoming a HIPC country, the IMF requires a strategy to combat poverty and at this moment the Flores’s government and civil society are cooperating to come up with a strategy for Honduras.

**Concluding Remarks**

The degree of pluralism accepted by the authoritarian regime is crucial for the prospects for democratic consolidation as it sets the conditions for the possibility of a civil society to grow. It is however not the existence of a civil society *per se* that explains democratic consolidation. It has been argued here that in order to understand the role of civil society in the consolidation process we must concentrate civil society as a source of change. Among these changes is the development of a civic society, or a democratic political culture one of the most important. Civil society

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25 In the Tegucigalpa Declaration Jubilee 2000, Latin American and Caribbean Platform “Yes to Life, No to Debt” it is argued that no country should pay more than 3% of the national budget on debt. It is argued that the debt is unpayable mathematically, and that it is immoral and illegitimate because the decision was made by an authoritarian government.
can also facilitate democratic consolidation by strengthening political society and by reducing poverty.

Against this background, it is important that we refine our conceptualizations of civil society. We must, among other things, analyze the internal structures of the units of civil society. The more democratic the internal structures and thereby the more possibilities for equal participation, the more likely that a civic society will emerge. Another important aspect is the relation to the political society. Civil society is not isolated from the political society, but rather in constant interaction with it.

As the cases of Guatemala and Honduras demonstrate civil society is not always perfectly working. All parts of civil society are certainly not democratic and transparent. The organizational culture is a reflection of the culture, and some organizations are corrupt and undemocratic. In my opinion, civil society in these countries is an elite project. Most ordinary people do not participate in what we normally refer to as civil society, but rather in religious organizations and networks. But I would still argue that civil society is a crucial factor in the consolidation process, as a source of change. Civil society is not just a reflection of the culture, it can also change cultural patterns.

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