

Understanding the Relationship between Civil Society and the State

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Abstract

World is facing so many challenges like the protection of the human rights of people, protection and preservation of the environment, terrorism, racial violence, drug trafficking and sale, climate change and so on. States or the governments alone cannot tackle these challenges. Civil Society is one important institution that has come in support of the governments in facing all these challenges. However, sometimes relationship between state and civil society becomes tense as states start thinking that civil society institutions are interfering in their jurisdiction. To deal with such tensions, different thinkers have provided various theoretical perspectives, which have been discussed in this paper.

Keywords: Liberalism, Communitarians, Authoritarian, Citizens, Civic Systems, policy, decision making

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Liberal-Democrats, Social Democrats, New Right and New Left, Libertarians and Communitarians offer different alternative models of social order. However, even in such an environment there is a general consensus on certain features or needs like the protection and development of the human rights of all peoples of the world, protection and preservation of the environment, terrorism, racial violence, drug trafficking and sale, and climate change. All the theories believe that Governments or states cannot achieve these targets single handedly. They need the civil society to share the responsibility with states or governments. It is therefore imperative for us to understand the meaning and nature of civil society and at the same time, the relationship between state and civil society.

What is Civil Society?

The concept of civil society has been used to collectively identify all the voluntary organizations, corporate bodies, groups active in social life and organizations present and functioning in each society. Civil society is integrated with the middle level institutions that exist between the family and the state which play an active and positive role in socio-economic-cultural activities. (Chambers, S., & Kopstein, 2006) Civil society performs various responsibilities. All of these responsibilities fall into the private sector but their purpose is to achieve social reform or social development or public welfare or sustainable development, not the development of the interests of any particular individual or organization or private entity. Schmitter defined civil society as "[a] set or system of self-organized intermediary groups" (Schmitter 1995:1). "Similarly, *The Concise Oxford dictionary of Politics* defined civil society as the set of intermediate associations which are neither the state nor the (extended) family; civil society therefore includes voluntary associations and firms and other corporate bodies."

Civil society is based on the premise that the welfare state, also known as the national state, turns individuals into its own puppets and turns into an autocratic state by the widespread use of coercion in the name of welfare. The state, and the ruling party in particular, take on authoritarian traits and impose needless restrictions on individual rights and freedoms in the name of welfare. In this kind of setting, the state must play a smaller role, have less authority, and perform fewer functions. So that individuals can meet their needs and pursue their interests through non-profits and pool their resources, it is critical that society foster the growth and empowerment of civil society. Make an effort to satisfy one's passions. These groups are apart from the government and fight against any initiative, legislation, or policy change that they believe will hurt the people. When asked how civil society came to be, various academics have offered varying explanations. The idea that civil society is "self-generating" is one that Larry Diamond holds (Diamond 1994:4). According to Rousseau, civil society is best understood as an intentional and self-aware movement. Acting as a mysterious midwife in the birth of civil society, he relies on a "Legislator" who is both separate from the people on whose behalf he acts and who remains outside of civil society after its birth. That is, according to Harbeson et al. (1994:17). Almond and Verba (1980:8) present a Marxist interpretation that places an emphasis on how the civic culture is impacted by the unavoidable development of material progress.

Civil society is also needed in an authoritarian regime because only such a society can work for the establishment of a democratic system by its own efforts to overthrow the authoritarian regime. We have an important recent example. Civil society in Pakistan, especially the Bar Association of Pakistan, made a concerted effort to restore democracy by overthrowing President Pervez Musharraf's dictatorial regime in 2008 and continues to do so today. It is making active and comprehensive efforts for the reinstatement of illegally dismissed judges.

Relationship between State and Civil Society

Originally the words civil society and political society were used interchangeably but in modern times, the concept of the state and civil society are considered different from each other. Different thinkers have opined differently on the relationship between state and civil society. In the ancient times of the Roman Empire, the Roman thinker Cicero made it clear that civil society was not just an external structure of the state. Civil society meant a society in which all its members lived together as citizens and followed the civil laws in which a civilized, culturally dignified life was achieved. In other words, Cicero strongly / strongly condemned the wildlife system and strongly advocated for civic social life. Later in the 17th century, John Locke used the term civil society, but he interpreted it as political society. He said that when the people made a social compromise for the abolition of the natural state and this created civil society. Locke defined civil society as a well-organized, disciplined, and sovereign society, and called it the state, which in turn established a government through a political agreement with a few individuals. The French philosopher Rousseau also used the terms civil society and political society synonymously, stating that such a society legally treats all citizens equally before the law. (Harbeson 1994:294)

Another philosopher who drew a distinction between civil society and the state was Hegel, a German idealist. In his definition, Hegel considered the state to be one of the most crucial divine institutions. In contrast, he characterized civil society as an organization where individuals interact and collaborate to achieve their personal goals. Karl Marx, while willing to acknowledge Hegel's perspectives, did not accept the differentiation between civil society and the state. According to Marx, since the bourgeoisie had complete control over civil society, synonymous with the state, there was no distinction between the two. Marx viewed the state as nothing more than a servant to the dominant interests of civil society. However, various perspectives exist on the state, with some considering it a common entity encompassing all parties, while others argue against this notion. Marx contended that the development of capitalism is the only means for civil society to reach its full potential. Considering the historical stage, the disparities between equal citizenship within the state and the inequalities among social classes become more pronounced. If such contradictions intensify, a class conflict between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat is inevitable. Should this power struggle be resolved in favor of the proletariat, Marx believed that the state would become obsolete, paving the way for the flourishing of civil society. (S. Chambers and Kopstein's, 2006)

An excellent explanation of the concept of civil society in contemporary times was provided by Gramsci, an Italian thinker who adheres to the neo-Marxist ideology. His argument was that every society is composed of two distinct levels of structure: the first is a civil society, which is comprised of all citizens, and the second is a political society, which serves as a control mechanism. The institutions that are a part of civil society include families, educational institutions, churches, and other similar establishments. These institutions are responsible for transmitting the societal value system from the current generation to the subsequent generation. In addition to the police, the judiciary, and the prisons, political society also comprises other political bodies that exercise control over society. In order to legitimise its power and continue to retain its hegemonic position in society, political society (the state) employs the use of force and coercion, whereas civil society makes use of civil society. Civil society is becoming increasingly significant as a result of its consistent performance of a large number of democratic functions. Upon analysing the survey data from five different countries, Almond and Verba came to the conclusion that the individual who is a member of the organisation, regardless of whether or not they are politically engaged, is more likely to believe themselves to be more competent as citizens and to be more active participants in political processes. In contrast to the nonmember, the member seems to be a more accurate representation of what we have referred to as the democratic citizen. According to Almond and Verba (1963:320), he is knowledgeable, engaged, and forthright with his viewpoints. The most striking discovery is that any membership, whether it be passive membership or membership in a nonpolitical organisation, has an effect on political competence and, consequently, on pluralism, which is one of the most essential foundations of political democracy (Almond and Verba 1963:321). In addition, Nie, Powell, and Prewitt study the democratic functions of civil society in terms of the effects that it has on political involvement. They are of the opinion that as the number of economic and secondary organisations grows in density and complexity, a greater proportion of the population will find themselves in life circumstances that result in an increase in political information, political awareness, a sense of personal political efficacy, and other attitudes that are pertinent. In turn, these shifts in mindset contribute to increases in the number of people participating in political processes. (Nie, Powell, and Prewitt; 1969:808)

Differences between State and Civil Society

The state is a sovereign, organized, single political community of all individuals having a definite territory and which is enacted by an organized government. Civil society, on the other hand, means that all those non-governmental, private, socio-economic, cultural, ethical and other bodies or organizations of the people function outside the state structure. It is a group of autonomous and voluntary private organizations which are created by the citizens themselves and run by them with their own resources and efforts. The state carries out legislative, executive and judicial functions in the society through a legally organized government. On the other hand, nature of Civil Society is apolitical as civil society carries out social, economic and cultural functions but at the same time it actively opposes the wrong and authoritarian policies, decisions and practices of the government. A democratic state and its government can also try to use its power in an authoritarian manner. Civil society has always opposed such use of government power. When a democratic government makes unnecessary authoritarian interference in the rights, freedoms or personal affairs of citizens, civil society strongly opposes it. Civil society strongly opposes any violation of human rights and encourages people to make their own efforts to protect and exercise their human rights and to work actively for the fulfillment of their rights and interests through mutual cooperation and efforts. Civil society can pressurize, influence or help state in making decisions but ultimate authority of decision making is always in the hands of state. Even the most liberal states do not surrender their decision-making authority to civil society institutions.

It is important to understand that civil society can never replace the state. It acknowledges the need, utility and role of the state in society. It only opposes a very powerful or very active and authoritarian state. In fact, civil society plays a major role in opposing the authoritarian policies of the government. It also participates in the organization and functions of a democratic government. It also participates in the security operations of the state and in the process of meeting public needs. The state and civil society must work together. The state can achieve very productive work and results in collaboration with the civil society. Civil society can also fulfill its objectives

by working within the territory of the state. The notions of the state and civil society are by no means antithetical. The democratic system combines the two. Civil society also expresses the demands and aspirations of the people and works for their fulfillment in the state. By operating in a democratic state, a democratic society is able to function in a more powerful way. Therefore, it is imperative that the state and civil society always work together in a democratic structure. The existence of a democratic state is very important in the structure of a democratic civil society. In a democracy, both the state and the civic system can work together to make each other's work more effective.

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