Note from the editors

This is the fifth edition of the ISTR Africa newsletter during a time in which the Civicus 2024 State of Civil Society report notes that the world is in disarray. This is related to conflicts in Gaza, Russia, Myanmar and Sudan. The report notes that the intensifying conflict results in the suppression of fundamental human rights and in most instances the curtailing of civil society activities and a repression of the sector in general. The report also notes the ways in which democracy is a contested territory and calls for a need for global governance reform and a genuine commitment to sustainable development.

On the African continent democracy is being tested with protest actions in Kenya reflecting youth frustrations and elections in South Africa signalling changes to dominant party politics. The recent Generation Z revolution in Kenya to reject the government’s 2024 Finance Bill shows there is a new consciousness amongst Generation Z about their role as citizens. The Finance Bill triggered the pilling up of frustrations among the youth. Again, this is another call to African governments that issues of job opportunities, living conditions, access to education, and health, if not addressed promptly, can ignite a revolution. Technology is a powerful tool the youth have in their hand to make their voice heard.

Waning patience at the pace of change amongst African electorates was demonstrated in South Africa on 29 May 2024 as former liberation movement and governing party, the African National Congress, lost its electoral majority for the first time in South Africa’s 30 year history of democracy. Negotiations amongst both longstanding and newer political

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parties has now seen the formation of a Government of National Unity, with the ANC’s President Cyril Ramaphosa at its head. This shift in the post-1994 electoral terrain ushers in a new but uncertain political future as both contestation and the need for compromise will be what characterises the South Africa’s seventh administration. In a context of continued structural inequality, high unemployment and intergenerational poverty, democracy will continue to be put to the test by citizens for whom the promise of a ‘better life for all’ remains elusive.

The events and publications highlighted below reflect debates and discourses within civil society pertinent to Africa and to the Global South.

**Conferences**

The *International Society for Third Sector Research (ISTR) International Conference* programme (16-19 July 2024 in Antwerp, Belgium) under the theme: *Crisis After Crisis After …: What About the Third Sector* is available at: [https://www.istr.org/page/ISTR2024](https://www.istr.org/page/ISTR2024)


Registration is still open for the *African Philanthropy Conference*: 29 July-2 August 2024 in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe. The theme is ‘The next frontiers of African philanthropy’ and the conference is hosted by the *Centre on African Philanthropy and Social Investment (CAPSI)*. Registration is at: [https://africanphilanthropyconference.com/conference/5th-african-philanthropy-conference/](https://africanphilanthropyconference.com/conference/5th-african-philanthropy-conference/)

The *African Philanthropy Network 2024 Assembly* is also taking place in Victoria Falls, Zimbabwe on 4-8 November 2024: [https://africaphilanthropynetwork.org/save-the-date-apn-assembly-2024/](https://africaphilanthropynetwork.org/save-the-date-apn-assembly-2024/)

The *African Philanthropy Forum* conference is taking place in Marrakech, Morocco on 27-29 October 2024. The theme is: A new agenda for African philanthropy – catalysing funding to accelerate Africa’s transformation. Registration is at: [https://africanpf.org/conference/](https://africanpf.org/conference/)

**Reports**

The 2024 United Nations Civil Society Conference which took place in May in Nairobi, Kenya has released a report on the outcome on discussions of ‘Impact for the future’. Among the themes highlighted were: sustainable development and financing development; international peace and security; global digital impact; youth and transforming global governance. The report is available at: https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2024uncsc_impact_for_the_future_outcome_package.pdf

The 2024 Civil Society Policy Forum – formulated to facilitate engagement between civil society and the World bank and IMF took place in April. A number of sessions centred on development were convened including: climate, human development, agriculture, governance, financing, accountability and citizen engagement. The sessions can be viewed: https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/e447d6d16dc28a2cc7a4617d7023e9b1-0360012024/original/CSPF-Schedule.pdf

The 7th edition of the Annual Africa Conference on Social Entrepreneurship (AACOSE) took place in Nairobi from 15-17 May. The theme was: Building Network to Advance Social Entrepreneurship in Africa. The conference brought together over 350 delegates from different countries. The conference provided learning and networking opportunities to accelerate social entrepreneurs. The youth Festival and AACOSE academia are novelty of this 7th edition. More information is available at: https://aacose.org/

The 2024 Afrobarometer Democracy Score Cards will be available on 17 July accessible at: https://www.afrobarometer.org/publications/democracy-scorecards/
Afrobarometer country democracy scorecards present graphic illustrations of our latest survey findings and over-time trends on key indicators of democratic demand and supply, from support for democratic norms and practices to satisfaction, freedoms, and perceptions of official corruption.

Scorecards for all 39 African countries surveyed in Round 9 (2021/2023) will be launched on 17 July.

**Selected Publications**

ISTR has introduced a Working Paper Series and the first paper (abstract below) is available at: [https://www.istr.org/page/WPFeatures](https://www.istr.org/page/WPFeatures)

The newly created ISTR Working Paper Features is a designed publication opportunity for ISTR members, particularly advanced stage PhD students, early career academics, and pracademics, to present fresh-from-the-field works, innovative thought pieces, theoretical reviews, and more; and, to use this space as an important steppingstone for further development of scholarship and research collaboration. Moreover, the ISTR Publication Committee, acting as the interim editors of this Series, would like to invite all members to consider this space to showcase work-in-progress with grounded observations and reflections. If you are not an ISTR Member, [please join today](https://www.istr.org/page/WPFeatures) to submit your work.

**Scope**

Open to all relevant topics covered by ISTR scholarly community, but the preference is given to pieces with fresh fieldwork notes and original theoretical engagement and manuscripts submitted by PhD students, early career researchers/academics, and professional members.

**ISTR Working Paper: A Postcolonial Deconstruction of Development**

17 Jun 2024
Joe Wheeler University of Oregon

Abstract

This paper critiques the field of international development. In practice, the field is dominated by a particular vision of development: free trade, liberalization, and privatization. The consequences of adopting this model include putting low-income countries in debt, reinforcing negative stereotypes about the so-called “Third World,” and exacerbating climate change. Drawing from the field of postcolonial theory, this paper suggests that international development should: a) be more comprehensive than solely focusing on GDP and employment as proxies for economic growth; b) reframe economics and political science to give more voice and agency to individual peoples’ experiences, rather than purely reducing people to numbers; and c) include reparations in development policy to undo the vast structural inequalities persisting since the colonial era.
The Paradox of Elites in Civil Society: A Comparative Study on Civil Society Leaders’ Satisfaction with Democracy in the UK and Sweden
Megan K. Baxter Jayeon Lee Minja Odai Roberto Scaramuzzino
Published online 11 June 2024 35(3)

Abstract The presence of an elite group in civil society elicits a discursive friction between the long-standing normative understanding of civil society, acting as a check on government overreach and autocratic tendencies, and elite theories. Robert Michels’s iron law of oligarchy posits that as individuals rise in the ranks to become organizational leaders, they begin to take on elite attributes, and their priorities align with those of other elites and away from those of their constituents. Michels’s argument echoes with today’s populist anti-elitist rhetoric and the way populism rejects any intermediary bodies between the people and the political leaders, including interest organizations in civil society. As an attempt to empirically probe this theoretical tension, this paper explores satisfaction with the way democracy is working among the top-level leaders of the most well-resourced national-level civil society organizations in Sweden and in the UK, drawing on a survey study conducted in 2020–21.

Governing for the Common Good: The Possibilities of Sociocracy in Nonprofit Organizations
Daniel King Martyn Griffin
Published online 10 June 2024 35 (3)

Abstract Within nonprofit organizational studies, there has been a long-standing interest in democratic governance as ways of building political participation, civic skills and fostering inclusion. While established approaches to democratic governance have many benefits, existing research points to numerous challenges, including apathy and oligarchization. This paper explores an alternative form of democratic governance, sociocracy. Sociocracy, sometimes called dynamic governance, is organized around four key elements: circular hierarchy, consent-based decision-making, double linking, and practices to foster inclusivity and voice, a unique blend which distinguishes it from other forms of democratic governance. This article explores the implications on workplace democracy that a nonprofit organization experienced when limiting it. We find that sociocracy offers many benefits, including empowering members and reducing the risk of domination, and also highlights the many challenges that can accompany the implementation of sociocracy, particularly how four forms of inequality contribute to those challenges.

Civil Society and the Spread of Authoritarianism: Institutional Pressures and CSO Responses
Galia Chimiak Zhanna Kravchenko Ulla Pape
35(2) 2024 Editorial

Beyond the “NGOization” of Civil Society: A Framework for Sustainable Community Led Development in Conflict Settings
Rashed Al Jayousi 1 Yuko Nishide1
35(1) 2024

Abstract In this study, we aim to investigate the much shrouded and problematic role of civil society organizations (CSOs) in conflict settings. We argue that to go beyond the “NGOization” of CSOs, there is a need to have a macro perspective of the interaction mechanisms between the shifting dynamics that CSOs play in development efforts. This lack of perspective impedes the ability of CSOs to navigate challenges in conflict settings because examining CSO dynamics independently will not be sufficient to develop effective solutions. Therefore, we investigated the interplay between
dynamics in the case of Palestinian CSOs through our interactive framework, where we identified three main barriers faced by CSOs and eight interaction mechanisms between each of the dynamics and the barriers. Our framework appeals to policymakers and practitioners alike by offering practical implications emphasizing the role of locally led initiatives that mobilize communities to innovate and govern, with guidance from CSOs.

Collaboration to support refugees: The importance of local-level relations among civil society organizations
Sophie Kolmodin
JOURNAL OF CIVIL SOCIETY
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ABSTRACT
Collaboration and relations are essential for most civil society organizations (CSOs). Still, little is known about what drives CSOs to collaborate among themselves when supporting refugees. By analysing drivers for collaboration and relational aspects in Malmö, Sweden, as the empirical setting, including how past, present, and anticipated future relations affect CSOs’ organizational behaviour, the article aims to contribute to our understanding of CSOs’ collaboration when supporting refugees. While collaborative drivers are important to understand the motivation to collaborate, adding a relational perspective helps us understand the complexity of collaboration, especially when CSOs do not exclusively collaborate to benefit their own organization. Past relations are essential for some collaboration, whereas other collaboration and behaviour create new ties and intensify existing ones. Moreover, the results demonstrate that on a local level, a variety of CSOs is crucial as they complement each other in covering different needs.

Examining the relationship between women’s descriptive political representation and women’s possibility to participate in civil society across regime types
Anna Ehrharta, Susanne Wallman Lundåsen and Gustav Lidéna
JOURNAL OF CIVIL SOCIETY
2024, VOL. 20, NO. 2, 150–169
ABSTRACT
This study examines the link between women’s representation in national parliaments and their possibility to participate in civil society. Utilizing panel data from the Varieties of Democracy (V Dem) dataset, covering 1975–2019, we investigate how the presence of women in parliaments influences the possibility for women to participate in civil society, especially in non-liberal democratic settings. The results indicate a positive association post-1990, coinciding with an international emphasis on civil society and a rise in women’s parliamentary representation in both liberal democracies and autocratic regimes. The study however highlights that in hybrid and autocratic regimes, increased female representation can also be used to project a gender-equal image without genuine democratization intentions. These findings suggest a correlation between the increase in women in parliaments and greater opportunities for their participation in civil society, but do not imply that the results reflect processes towards democracy. The findings contribute to understanding women’s possibilities in non-democratic regimes.
and underscores the need for further qualitative analysis to fully grasp the implications of these trends.

EXPANDING PROTEST EVENT ANALYSIS THROUGH VIDEOS

Donatella della Porta; Sophia Hunge; Swen Hutter; Anna Lavizzari


The increasing availability of digital video material has led to its widespread use in the social sciences, especially in research adopting processual and relational approaches. However, methodological reflection has not developed at the same pace. In this article, we propose ways to extend classical protest event analysis using videos of contentious events. Our novel method, video-enhanced protest event analysis (vPEA), expands protest event research on two frontiers. First, researchers can use vPEA extractively, contributing to source triangulation and increasing the validity of written sources. Second, it can be used reconstructively, expanding the range of information available by capturing emotional atmosphere, choreography, and processes and dynamics more generally. The article provides a step-by-step guide through the vPEA process, which we illustrate using a secondary analysis of existing research and original material on Covid-related protests in Germany and Italy.

WHEN BLACK MOVEMENTS MATTER: CONTROLLING IMAGES AND BLACK LIVES MATTER PROTESTS IN MEDIA ATTENTION TO U.S. POLICE KILLINGS

Todd Lu


This study investigates how the portrayal of Black criminality influences Black Lives Matter (BLM) protests and media attention to police-related deaths of Black individuals. While prior work examined how media norms, political contexts, and movement infrastructure influence media attention, little research has questioned whether the perceived worthiness of movement’s claims shapes the capacity of protests to direct attention. Applying scholarship of controlling images, I test how victims’ armed status moderates the effect of BLM protests on media attention to Black policing deaths. Negative binomial regression analysis on coverage of 678 Black Americans killed by police from 2014-2016 in over 300 print media indicates local protests directly increased attention to nearby Black Americans but were moderated by armed status. Neither political contexts nor organizational presence influenced attention, suggesting BLM relied on the discursive power of protests. Findings highlight how controlling images and racialized threats influence movements along a matrix of domination.