Editor’s Note

This fourth edition of the Africa third-sector researchers network newsletter highlights key platforms for third sector and civil society scholarly and praxis work in 2024. This newsletter edition also highlights critical publications for those working in the area of civil society and philanthropy.

Conferences

Reminding that the ISTR International Conference is 16-19 July 2024 in Antwerp, Belgium under the theme: Crisis After Crisis After ...: What About the Third Sector? The call for abstracts and panel proposals has now closed. Notification of acceptance will be sent early January. Presenters must register to attend my March 26, 2024 and accepted papers are due by 7 June 2024: https://www.istr.org/page/ISTR2024

The Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism (ASEN) Conference is taking place on 9-11 April 2024 at the University of Edinburgh, UK on the subject of Nationalism and Memory. More information is available at: https://asen.ac.uk/conference/

The Africa Studies Association of the UK (ASAUK) Conference is taking place from 29-31 August 2024 at Oxford Brooks University, UK. The theme is Generation and Regeneration and abstracts may be submitted at: https://asauk.net/

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Fellowships

The 2024 call for Fellows under the London School of Economics Atlantic Fellows for Social and Economic equity are open as below: https://afsee.atlanticfellows.lse.ac.uk/en-gb/apply

Are you a change-maker committed to fighting inequality? Do you want to learn from scholars, innovators, activists and social change organisations, and the latest academic research and expert insights on inequalities? Are you ready to join forces with a lifelong global network of peers?

We are looking for Fellows who are bold and ready to challenge power; who see the bigger picture of how inequalities are playing out; who are imaginative and daring in the way they envision solutions; who bring care and collaboration into their practice; who recognise the significance of lived experience of inequality, and whose own lived experience informs their practice; who focus not on advancing their careers, but on their commitment to changing the world through collective and collaborative approaches.

Applications for the 2024-25 programme are now open and will close at 5pm UK time on 11 January 2024.

Selected Publications

Volume 34, Issue 4, August 2023

Who Helps Refugees in South Africa? An Examination of Cultural and Social Factors
Steven Lawrence Gordon
747–759 (2023)

Abstract

Pro-refugee philanthropy is beneficial for refugee integration and an important contributor to intergroup relations in a South African context. No study, however, has provided an in-depth quantitative analysis of what factors drive this type of behaviour. This article investigates what cultural, social and religious factors may predict participation in charitable behaviour towards refugees in South Africa. Three types of behaviours were examined: (i) material donations; (ii) volunteer activities; and (iii) information sharing. Using data from a 2019 Ipsos Migration Survey, the study found that intergroup threat was a robust predictor of charitable behaviour of all kinds. Friendship contact with a pro-refugee volunteer was also positively associated with philanthropic behaviour. Institutional trust and religious orientation were correlated with volunteer activities and information sharing but not donations. Study findings can be utilised to design interventions that increase public participation in actions that help refugees in an African context.
How Does an Authoritarian State Co-opt Its Social Scientists Studying Civil Society?
Ji Ma
830–846 (2023)
Abstract

What channels can an authoritarian state employ to steer social science research towards topics preferred by the regime? I researched the Chinese coauthor network of civil society studies, examining 14,088 researchers and their peer-reviewed journal articles published between 1998 and 2018. Models with individual and time fixed-effects reveal that scholars at the center of the network closely follow the narratives of the state’s policy plans and could serve as effective state agents. However, those academics who connect different intellectual communities tend to pursue novel ideas deviating from the official narratives. Funding is an ineffective direct means for co-opting individual scholars, possibly because it is routed through institutions. Combining these findings, this study proposes a preliminary formation of authoritarian knowledge regime that consists of (1) the state’s official narrative, (2) institutionalized state sponsorship, (3) co-opted intellectuals centrally embedded in scholarly networks, and (4) intellectual brokers as sources of novel ideas.

Volume 34, Issue 5, October 2023

Civil Society in Latin America: Experiments, Resilience, New Utopias
Patricia Maria E. Mendonça and Humberto Muñoz Grandé
900–910 (2023)
Abstract

This paper introduces the special issue focused on Latin America and the Caribbean (LA&C), featuring five papers penned by local authors. Reviewing Voluntas journal's main topics concerning LA&C as grassroots movements within civil society, the third sector including its definitions and institutional context, philanthropy, and volunteer work. After organizing these discussions, we summarize the five papers included in this special issue. We connect these papers with broader debates in the LA&C literature and emphasize their unique contributions. A significant amount of the LA&C research relies on case studies. We advocate for increased usage of local databases to conduct quantitative studies. Furthermore, while most theoretical models use non-local frameworks, we encourage research that presents fresh theoretical viewpoints to enrich the debate.

The paths of solidarity economy: the emergence and maintenance of social policies through collective action
Caio Coradi Momesso and Mário Aquino Alves Fábio Grigoletto
933–944 (2023)
Abstract

Solidarity is a fundamental concept in social sciences, explaining the motivation for collective action and understanding how social cohesion institutions are structured. Its conceptualization, however, is often taken for granted in solidarity economy literature. This article investigates its emergence in solidarity economy organizations and the transformation through practices and discourse in public policies. We conducted a
qualitative single-case study of COOPERCENTRAL VR, a family farming cooperative center with 13 organizations in Brazil. In conclusion, we demonstrate the paths of solidarity in the construction of a new socioeconomic reality and the role of the relationship between civil society and governments in forming and maintaining this process. The organization is indicated as an essential factor in bonding subjects and society.

Campaigns without civil society? The involvement of organized interests in electoral politics
Marco Lisi João Gaio e Silva
Pages 382-400 | Published online: 15 Sep 2023
ABSTRACT
Elections are key moments for interactions between civil society and representatives. While bottom-up mobilization tries to influence the composition of parliament and policy outputs, political parties and politicians engage with broader civil society to strengthen their legitimacy and to obtain strategic benefits in terms of electoral results. This study focuses on the role organized interests play in election campaigns and explains why collective societal actors do not engage in a significant way in the electoral process. By examining the Portuguese case during the 2019 elections, this study relies on data triangulation to map the involvement of organized interests in the electoral process. We argue that political parties have no incentives to foster linkages with interest groups, while civil society organizations prefer to stay in the shade or do not have opportunities to engage in electoral politics. The findings have implications not only in terms of low levels of political mobilization, but also with regard to policy innovation (and lack thereof).

A bird's eye view of civic engagement and its facets: Canonical correlation analysis across 34 countries
Kaitlyn Battershill and Victor Kuperman
Pages 437-463 | Published online: 13 Sep 2023
ABSTRACT
Civic engagement is a multi-faceted concept that is integral to the proper functioning of a democratic society. The present study investigates the effect that a wide range of individual-level demographic, educational, cognitive, and health-related predictors have on civic engagement and its facets, providing an overview of 34 countries around the world. The use of canonical correlation analysis allows us to quantify both the shared and unique contribution of the predictors to two facets of civic engagement, voluntary work and political efficacy. The common scale of the analysis provides an intuitive visualization of barriers and pathways to one's engagement in the community and society at large. We further ground our findings in country-level socio-demographic data, providing external validation to our method.
Anticorruption frames: Bridging accountability
Alessandra Lo Piccolo
Pages 251-270 | Published online: 28 Jul 2023

ABSTRACT

Studies indicate that the success of anticorruption reforms depends upon the support of civil society actors (CSAs), whereas bottom-up initiatives need a certain degree of vertical integration with political elites to bring about long-lasting change. Indeed, anticorruption is a multi-actor field populated by political parties, the media, NGOs, interest groups, and social movements. Each of these actors shapes the outcome of the anticorruption struggle, bringing to the fore its logic, goals, strategies, and, most importantly, its discourses. Studies on frames and discourses have shown how corruption narratives inform policymaking. However, few studies have examined institutional and civil society anticorruption frames and their impact on anticorruption policies simultaneously. Focusing on the Italian case through a frame analysis of parties’, regulatory agencies’, and CSAs’ documents, newspapers, and interviews, this work looks at processes of frame alignment and frame disputes between civic and institutional actors and tries to assess their impact in shaping the Whistleblowing Protection Act (2017). The article aims at reintroducing the analysis of grassroots frames alongside institutional ones to understand the impact of discourses on anticorruption policymaking.

Cataloging Protest: Newspapers, Nexis Uni, Or Twitter?*
Lesley J. Wood and Dyllan Goldstein
https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-28-3-343

What is the best source for tracking protest activity? Newspaper sources remain dominant, but other options are tempting. This article compares three differently sourced catalogs of protest events in Toronto from July 15 to September 15, 2020. The widely discussed Movement for Black Lives and housing justice cycles of protest are visible in all three catalogs, but apart from this, the field of protest they reveal is very different. While the coverage by the newspaper with the largest circulation, the Toronto Star, shows Toronto protest as state-centered, domestic, and progressive, other catalogs that include television, radio, and social media content reveal a more diverse, fragmented, and globalized protest field. Catalogs sourced from Nexis Uni and Twitter show the significant presence of diasporic protest. These observations suggest new limits to relying on mainstream newspapers for representing the full array of protest activity. We recommend that, moving forward, researchers experiment with media aggregators to incorporate sources such as television coverage and social media into their research while remaining aware of the additional challenges such data generate.
Creating And Maintaining Free Spaces In The Radical Left
Colm Flaherty
https://doi.org/10.17813/1086-671X-28-2-249

Radical social movements require free spaces to meet, interact, and mobilize. Free spaces, or settings where individuals create and maintain alternative ways of life, enable the creation of movement identities, frames, and cultures. Based on a long-term ethnographic study of a radical left-libertarian movement in Sweden, this article explores how free spaces are created, maintained, and changed. Adopting an interactionist approach, I demonstrate that free spaces are political accomplishments which activists pursue as political goals. The article also examines how activists repair breaches to free spaces through interactions where activists not only recommit to the shared norms of participation in the setting but also demonstrate their devotion to the movement’s values. I conclude by arguing that studying the everyday practices of free spaces enables us to better understand how radical movements survive, splinter, or disintegrate.

Civil Society Reports & Podcasts

Civicus Report on Climate Activism:  
Release Date – November 2023. Available  

CIVICUS Voices is a podcast that brings you voices of people, communities, and organisations defending civil liberties and human rights. Hosted by Aarti Narsee, the third season (2023) of the podcast is focused on the right to Freedom of Peaceful Assembly (aka protesting). Available at:  
https://www.civicus.org/