



*GLOBAL*  
*CIVIC*  
*ACTIVISM*  
*IN*  
*FLUX*

**RICHARD YOUNGS**  
*editor*

← ————— →  
Youssef Cherif | Hafsa Halawa | Vijayan MJ  
Adams Oloo | Natalia Shapovalova | Janjira Sombatpoonsiri  
Marisa von Bülow | Özge Zihnioğlu

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## *ABOUT THE AUTHORS*

The Carnegie Civic Activism Network is a research network of leading experts on civic activism, dedicated to examining the changing patterns of civic activism in their countries and analyzing the implications for a new generation of civil-society assistance. The following members of the network contributed to this report.

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## *ACKNOWLEDGMENTS*

The Carnegie Endowment's Democracy and Rule of Law Program thanks the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation, the Ford Foundation, and the UK Department for International Development for research support that makes possible the work of the Civic Activism Network. The views expressed in this report are the responsibility of the authors alone.



# SUMMARY

Civil society around the world is in flux. New forms of civic activism have taken shape, ranging from protest movements to community-level forums and online campaigns by individual activists. Debate is growing over how much these new, dynamic forms of civic activism are displacing the influence wielded by traditional, professional, advocacy-based nongovernmental organizations (NGOs).

## **CHANGES IN CIVIL SOCIETY**

This analysis charts how civic activism is evolving across eight countries:

- In Brazil, civic activism has taken on a range of innovative organizational forms, with many new initiatives focusing on local issues while others are caught up in the country's deepening political polarization.
- In Egypt, the government's assault on civil society has prompted a move away from traditional NGOs as activists seek less visible forms of volunteerism and civic organization.
- In India, new types of community-based activism have added dynamism to campaigns against economic inequalities, social injustice, and the illiberal policies of the current government.

- In Kenya, activism increasingly combines informal networks and formal organizations to some effect, and these activists have in general distanced themselves from the political opposition.
- In Thailand, civil society is divided between two competing political camps, while new types of creative activism are emerging in opposition to the country's military regime.
- In Tunisia, civic activism has helped maintain the momentum of political reform; new types of more contentious activism have emerged to counter traditional NGOs' alignment with the country's relatively consensus-based and now faltering transition.
- In Turkey, the 2013 Gezi protests led to the creation of new community organizations as alternatives to formal NGOs; the government's current assault on civil society is a serious challenge that compounds the shift toward nonpolitical and local forms of activism.
- In Ukraine, a new spirit of volunteerism has grown since the 2014 Euromaidan revolt, while many prominent new activists have moved toward cooperating with the government.

## **OVERARCHING ISSUES**

These case studies reveal crosscutting themes relevant to the future of civil society support:

- While there is a global wave of new protests and innovative citizen movements, many civic struggles are increasingly rooted in specific national issues.
- New and older forms of civic activism coexist and intertwine in a variety of ways.
- Some new activism is highly political and confrontational; some is very practical and pragmatic about trying to circumvent the shortcomings of mainstream politics.
- New civic activism includes groups espousing an increasingly wide range of ideological positions.
- While the new activism has been effective on some specific issues, it is mostly struggling to hold at bay resurgent authoritarian and illiberal government responses.



# INTRODUCTION

*Richard Youngs*

Important changes appear to be under way in civil society across the world. Civil society organizations have been subject to considerable criticism and doubt over the past ten years, after enjoying an enormous expansion and heightened attention throughout the developing and post-Communist worlds in the 1990s. Influential observers and analysts in many quarters decry a predominant focus on Western-style nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). They argue that these groups are looking increasingly ineffective, tired, and out of touch—artificial creations often nourished by foreign supporters that lack real domestic constituencies and the ability to sustain themselves locally.

Some of these critics argue that more broadly based citizen movements are starting to reinvigorate the civic sphere, with dynamic and fluid new forms of civic organization emerging and gaining a significant presence in political and social debates. The rise of such groups appears to reflect a determination by citizens throughout the world to hold their governments to account. Citizens appear less tolerant of nepotism and corruption, and they are mobilizing through many kinds of campaigns to bear down on self-serving elites. People have also begun to organize themselves within local communities and neighborhoods in search of more equitable decisions about practical, everyday issues. Moreover, information communications technology is generating fundamental changes in the structures of social organization—in the view of some optimistic observers, this is contributing to a seemingly inexorable civic empowerment.

What some analysts refer to as a new contentious politics has taken root. This is not limited to particular regions and regime types, but is increasingly global. Large-scale protests have flared up in scores of states across every region. Many of these appear to have emerged with a degree of spontaneity, involving tens of thousands of citizens who previously were not politically active. Such is their ubiquity that these protests have become a defining feature of modern politics.

The revolts embrace a range of causes. Some are about democratic revolution, some about neoliberalism and globalization, some about specific cases of corruption, and others about very local issues. If their driving motivations are different, so are their outcomes. Some of the new civic mobilizations have ousted regimes; some have won major concessions from incumbent governments; others have failed in their declared aims.

Given this diversity, it is necessary to understand civic activism in a broad sense that includes the activities of formal organizations such as professional NGOs, long-established civil society bodies, looser and newer social movements, individual activists, and local community bodies. Emerging forms of civic activism include protests and less contentious forms of self-organization, embracing both online and offline tactics.

While many allude to growing empowerment, at the same time, there is a more negative side to civil society trends. Many governments are more assertively seeking to deploy a range of mechanisms designed to neuter civic activism's reach and impact. Regimes are imprisoning and even killing greater numbers of civic activists.<sup>1</sup> Close to 100 governments have introduced laws that restrict freedoms of association and assembly since 2012. In addition, these regimes are finding more subtle tactics to make life difficult for civil society organizations. In many parts of the world, the very principle of autonomous and free civil society is under assault, and activists are on the defensive.

Great and varied change is afoot within global civil society. For civic activism, it appears to be both the best and worst of times. The positive dynamics of empowerment and the negative trend of constraints on civil society are interconnected. Regimes are reacting nervously to potent new forms of civic activism; in turn, as government restrictions bite, activists look for new types of civic organization to stay ahead of regimes' repressive intent.

While there is widespread agreement that global civil society is evolving, there are many uncertainties about how best to conceptualize this change and its significance, impacts, and long-term ramifications. Some observers celebrate the new activism; others decry the unfocused looseness of its structures and the disruptive imprecision of its aims. Some paint a picture of ever-stronger civic empowerment; others argue that governments increasingly have the upper hand over global civil society. Some believe a fundamentally different type of

civil society is taking shape; others believe today's ascendant civic movements in fact exhibit few truly new features.

To shed light on these matters, in the autumn of 2016, Thomas Carothers and I launched a Civic Activism Network under the rubric of the Carnegie Endowment's Democracy and Rule of Law Program. The initiative has assembled eight experts on new forms of citizen activism in Brazil, Egypt, India, Kenya, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, and Ukraine. The group has embarked on a regular series of meetings, events, fieldwork, and publications to investigate the nature of the new civic activism in select developing and post-Communist countries (with a possible expansion to established Western democracies in the works). The purpose is not to act as cheerleaders for social movements, but to investigate in an open-minded fashion what the new civic activism really entails and what kind of potential it harbors.

This report kicks off this initiative with an overview of emerging forms of civic activism in the eight countries represented in the Civic Activism Network. The authors address what new kinds of civic activism are taking root, what issues new civic actors are focusing on, and how they relate to older civil society forms, especially advocacy and service-delivery NGOs.

The countries represented in the network include some high-profile cases that have done the most to spur debates about the new nature of civic activism. This includes countries with very contrasting dynamics, but also with useful general commonalities. For instance, social movements and protesters have been powerful enough to push governments out of power in Brazil, Egypt, Thailand, Tunisia, and Ukraine. Yet after they did so, very different forms of activism developed in these countries, and the impact on democracy has varied significantly across the cases. In other countries, increasingly illiberal political contexts have both driven forward a new locally rooted type of civic activism and made life very difficult for the new activists. Turkey is regularly cited as one of the most emblematic cases of the emergent informal, contentious politics, yet it is also a country where the gains of this activism are proving hard to sustain. This is also true of the otherwise very different cases of India and Kenya.

The report presents concise summaries of civil society developments in each of the eight countries. A concluding chapter draws out the main points of interest from the different countries, compares the cases, and reflects on the broader implications for global civil society. It highlights five crucial characteristics of the emerging civil society: (1) common trends among countries versus unique national qualities, (2) old versus new forms of activism, (3) overarching political versus bread-and-butter practical concerns, (4) liberal versus illiberal identities, and (5) effective versus ineffective forms of activism.

This study of civic activism has important implications for both the evolution of domestic political systems and for questions of foreign policy. It is insufficient today simply to press international institutions, Western powers, and foundations to provide more support. As

civil society itself has become such a fluid and varied arena of political and social activity, those keen to support civic activism require a more disaggregated map of how, where, and with whom they should and should not engage. And it is not enough to talk about global civil society either gaining or losing influence in a very generic sense. Greater precision is required on what civil society actually is and how it is changing. More work is needed on what kind of civic actors are most effective and in tune with their societies. This report aims to contribute to this endeavor.

## *BRAZIL: NEW ACTIVISM, CHANGING POLITICS*

*Marisa von Bülow*

Brazilian civil society stands at an intersection between the past and the future. From the past come the unresolved grievances that have been historically at the heart of the struggles for democracy and equality. Civil society actors remain resolutely focused on equal access to social, economic, and minority rights, as well as the problem of political corruption. In spite of great advances, these long-standing areas of civic activism are as important today as they were decades ago.

As many of civil society's substantive concerns today remain broadly consistent from previous periods, the reshaping of Brazilian activism relates less to why people mobilize than to how mobilization occurs and who participates in today's social movements. Brazilian civic activists are increasingly using significant though still incipient change to project a vision of the future. These changes include more systematic engagement with civic campaigns through the use of new digital technologies, the adoption of novel ways to organize, and the search for new channels to amplify citizen participation within state structures. New civil society trends in Brazil and across Latin America also flow from and feed into more polarized political landscapes.

### **OLD GRIEVANCES, NEW DIGITAL ACTIVISM**

A cursory dissection of recent mobilizations in Brazil suggests that citizens organize around the same kind of grievances that animated activism in previous decades. In recent years, Brazil

has seen a wave of strikes for labor rights and better wages; street protests against political corruption; the occupation of buildings and land by homeless and landless movements; and campaigns for gender equality, better social services, and improvements in human rights.

Yet the ways these mobilizations have been organized and implemented have changed in important ways. Calls for protests now rely on Facebook event pages. Demands are launched using Twitter hashtags. Blogs and other websites have become key places for activists to deliberate on crowdsourcing strategies and future actions. While some cases of e-mobilization begin and end online, most rely on a combination of old tactics—strikes, street protests, the occupation of buildings—and new digital strategies.

Tech-savvy constituencies in Brazil and other Latin American countries, such as Chile and Mexico, have resorted to social media as their primary tool in recent mobilizing efforts. The most prominent examples include Yo Soy 132 in Mexico, a youth-led movement that has called for the democratization of the media and for political reform; a Chilean student movement that has called for broad educational and political reform; and the mobilizations in favor of and against former Brazilian president Dilma Rousseff's impeachment that were based on intense online and offline mobilizations in 2015 and 2016.<sup>2</sup> There are also many other less visible cases of new activism that present old grievances through digital means of mobilization and organization, such as campaigns to denounce what are labeled culture of rape and to end gender-based violence, which have been triggered after cases of murder or sexual assault of women in countries such as Argentina and Brazil.

But, overall, the Internet has had a mixed impact on civil society empowerment in Brazil. While the Internet offers more opportunities for individuals to educate themselves about public issues and participate in events and campaigns, societal hierarchies have also taken root in online networks. This is, in part, due to the fact that Internet access is still far from universal here, being much higher among those who are more educated and those who live in urban areas. Furthermore, amid the use of bots, it is a challenge to have quality debates and to restrain the hate speech that thrives online. During the debates about the impeachment of Rousseff, offline political polarization was reproduced and even reinforced by social media.

In addition to these challenges, the impacts of so-called slacktivism remain a concern for many civil society organizations. According to many such groups, the ease of liking and sharing information about a variety of civic causes on social media leads only to short-term commitments, without creating the collective identities necessary to build sustainable social movements. For established organizations, such as the Landless Workers Movement, the individualism of social media activism can threaten a collective ethos that took years to acquire.<sup>3</sup> While feminist movements have used anti-rape and feminist hashtags that have gone viral in several recent campaigns, their activists argue that this kind of mobilization is “insignificant” in comparison with “real” activism, which is still understood as that which takes place offline.<sup>4</sup>

## SIGNIFICANT NEW CIVIC ACTORS

Emerging civil society organizations have responded in different ways to this new context in Brazil, particularly actors such as collectives, brokers, and hackers.

Brazil has a myriad of new collectives—loose organizations of similarly minded activists that focus on single issues, such as racism, gender, and animal or cultural rights. Collectives are organized as small groups that meet in schools, universities, neighborhoods, or workplaces. Some only have an online presence, such as animal rights groups that help find shelter for abandoned or injured animals through Facebook groups. There are also feminist groups, such as the Não Me Kahlo collective, which launched a Facebook page in 2014 and already has over 1 million followers.<sup>5</sup> These collectives have proven to be a powerful force, although they tend to fragment rather than align different strands of activism.

Another class of examples of emerging Brazilian civil society is new coalitions that help to coordinate joint action, functioning as increasingly influential “institutionalized brokers.”<sup>6</sup> These actors play a key bridging role among diverse groups of civil society organizations. These institutionalized brokers are not entirely novel forms of organization, but they have grown in number and in relevance. This is because of a trend toward fragmentation seen in certain aspects of civil society. Much of Brazil’s emerging activism is focused on creating broader space for common agendas that can unite very dispersed and disparate sets of actors. Participants aim to create more effective collective action by institutionalizing their joint efforts. A good example is the Coalition for Democratic Political Reform and Clean Elections. It was launched in 2013 by 114 social movements and civil society organizations that came together around a common proposal to change Brazil’s electoral system and the current rules on the funding of electoral campaigns.<sup>7</sup> To cite another example, the Brazilian Network for Peoples’ Integration was created in 2001 to fight against the Free Trade Area of the Americas negotiations.<sup>8</sup> Over time, this has become the most relevant meeting space for all civil society actors interested in influencing trade negotiations and integration processes in the Americas.<sup>9</sup>

Another set of civil society actors that is rising particularly fast in Brazil is hacker and free-software activism groups. They have mobilized intensively in the past few years through campaigns for new Internet legislation (which the Brazilian National Congress approved in 2014) and in favor of public policies that promote wider access to information. These new activists seek fundamentally to change decisionmaking patterns, by, for instance, pressuring for the use of online crowdsourcing to create or edit legislative proposals. They also aim to alter how public information is dispersed, for example by creating new apps to monitor politicians’ expenditures and actions in real time.

The initiatives that result from such pressure have potentially important impacts on relations between civil society and the state. Often, these impacts are less visible than the political

actions of grassroots movements or nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), because such activism is based on more fluid collaborative ties among individuals who occupy different positions—whether in civil society, the parliament, or the state bureaucracy. A good example is the Free Software Project,<sup>10</sup> which was created in the city of Porto Alegre at the end of the 1990s and brings together scholars, public officials, entrepreneurs, and activists that promote free-software initiatives. Hacktivists do not necessarily join protesters on the streets, but their collective actions speak to a key issue that has been driving mass mobilizations in the past three years: corruption.

In sum, some new forms of civic activism aim to break down campaigns into a plethora of very specific issues, while other forms of activism are about bringing together different actors around common agendas.

## **PARTY MOVEMENTS**

Crucially, these trends in civic activism are beginning to affect Brazil's political sphere. Current relationships between civil society and political parties, in particular, present an interesting paradox. On the one hand, distrust toward political institutions has grown in Brazil and in Latin America as a whole. Public opinion is especially negative toward political parties. Activists often ban the display of party flags or symbols in street protests. Activists often reject the participation of party leaders, even potential allies, as was the case in the rallies in favor of Rousseff's impeachment in 2016. As civil society bodies, such as labor unions and student organizations, distance themselves from political parties, the result has been party leaders having a diminished influence in the leadership elections of these organizations.

Yet paradoxically, new civil society activists also are participating in the creation of new political parties. Some of Brazil's most high-profile environmentalists, for instance, created the party Rede Sustentabilidade (Sustainability Network). More recently, conservative civil society organizations helped found another political party, the Partido Novo (the New Party). In Chile, the 2011 student protests gave rise to a new party called the *Revolución Democrática* (Democratic Revolution).

While close relationships between political parties and social movements are not new in Latin America, today's emerging movements are encountering different political conditions than their predecessors. Some movement-rooted parties actually elected presidents in the past decade, the best examples being Bolivia's *Movimiento al Socialismo* (Movement Toward Socialism) and Brazil's *Partido dos Trabalhadores* (Workers' Party). The most recent initiatives are best understood as second-generation party movements born with renewed promises of less bureaucratic internal governance rules, greater transparency, more innovation, and a commitment to specific social movement agendas. Emerging initiatives face a very different political environment from first-

generation parties, due to mounting distrust of political institutions in general and of political parties in particular, as well as increased political polarization.

## **POLITICAL POLARIZATION**

While the basic idea that a vibrant civil society is crucial for the consolidation and sustainability of democracy remains valid in Brazil, civil society itself has become increasingly fragmented and internally heterogeneous. Some undemocratic sectors of civil society have gained support in recent years. These trends have led to greater polarization in Brazilian politics—particularly between emergent right-wing groups and leftist.

At one end of the spectrum is the rise of right-wing civil society through the emergence of new organizations tied to transnational networks across the Americas. U.S. organizations are key sources of ideas and financial resources for these conservative networks. This new right is internally heterogeneous, and it is made up of various conservative strands that differ on important issues such as same-sex marriage and religious education. These groups united in Brazil around the call for impeaching then president Rousseff of the Workers' Party, but it is unclear whether they will remain united. The most vocal of these groups called openly for the return of military power. Although this was a minority voice within the impeachment campaign, and within civil society at large, the authoritarian values that such emergent groups sponsor have made headway in public policy and political discourse. This is clear from recent initiatives to toughen laws against crime, such as the campaign to lower the minimum age for criminal prosecution.

On the other side of Brazilian politics, the so-called pink tide that helped elect progressive governments with close ties to center-left social movements has ebbed across the region. In this shifting political context, it has become increasingly hard for organizations advocating for human, labor, and minority rights to advance their agendas. Such groups may become more dependent on international cooperation and on transnational allies than in the past, as domestic sources of funding and political support become closed to many civil society groups.

## **CONCLUSION**

New civic activism in Brazil—and other Latin American states—is highly dynamic in terms of adopting innovative organizational forms, even if it remains focused on familiar challenges. Some new activists hone in on very local and specific issues, while some try to build links between fragmented issues and social groups. Activists have sought more autonomy and local independence, but today they also need to rebuild alliances with other progressive actors as political challenges mount. Yet greater political polarization has made it harder for civil society in Brazil—as well as in Argentina, Ecuador, and Venezuela—to build these broad coalitions, or even to have a fruitful dialogue among different ideological factions. In short, this new civic activism is empowering but also potentially divisive.



## *EGYPT AND THE MIDDLE EAST: ADAPTING TO TRAGEDY*

*Hafsa Halawa*

Civic activism in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) provided much of the momentum for the Arab revolts of 2011. Since then, the trend toward new types of civil society has deepened. The MENA civic sphere is increasingly attuned to local community priorities.

The region's civic activists also have come under government fire, and this compounds efforts to move away from traditional nongovernmental organization (NGO) identities. The threat to civil society is especially serious in Egypt, a country that starkly encapsulates both the dynamism and the fragility of new civic activism. Meanwhile, local groups are responding to the humanitarian consequences of violent conflict in parts of the region, and their efforts are giving rise to new forms of volunteerism and civic organization.

### **A SHIFT TOWARD LOCAL CONCERNS**

In Egypt and elsewhere in the MENA region, the 2011 Arab Spring protests led to a proliferation of local civic organizations. Many of the new groups had no political or rights-based knowledge, but they had savvy leaders, organizers, and advocates capable of communicating in English who initially provided the diplomatic community and international organizations with like-minded, Western-influenced partners. Meanwhile, existing NGOs built on their long-term experience in documenting and advocating for rights-based issues, as well as engag-

ing with politicians and international networks. Some exploited old political networks and patronage systems to gain a foothold in the region's various political transitions, as institutions and power brokers all vied for power in the reshaped Arab region.

At this early stage, there was considerable Western funding for both new and existing NGOs—most notably for then-transitioning countries such as Egypt, Libya, Syria, Tunisia, and Yemen. Arab regional organizations began to use their newfound pan-Arabism to share experiences and cooperate on common goals of human rights, freedoms of assembly and expression, and gender equality, so as to build loose coalitions and joint presentations for the international community. Local experts on the ground became invaluable to think tanks, donors, and diplomats in following the region's tumultuous political developments and keeping up with its complexities. But the international community tended to stick with groups they already knew and did not do enough to identify and engage emerging civic actors.

Civic activism across the MENA region has now shifted inward so as to become more organically rooted, and many activists have less regard for the role of the international community, which they feel has largely abandoned them. In part because of increasingly harsh government repression, emerging groups are working in secrecy, looking at local issues that keep them below the radar and working on small operations with specific modest, short-term objectives. Research, for instance, has become a major focus of the human rights community, particularly regarding how activism moves forward under the current climate of repression. A sense of empowerment has taken root in the past five years—despite visible setbacks in nearly all areas of reform.

Civic activists in the MENA region are also adopting a range of new tactics. As elsewhere in the world, the increasing use of social media and other media tools is a powerful trend. Video is now a prominent documentation tool that adds a raw element of emotional appeal that traditional human rights documentation previously did not have. Overnight, online Twitter and Facebook profiles are creating heroes based on individuals' defiance of regimes and violent nonstate actors. In addition, partnerships convening entrepreneurs, angel investors, and rights-led organizations are working to bring together online communities across the region. Promoting freedoms through the private sector and the entrepreneurial start-up community is now safer than undertaking overtly political campaigning, organizing, and protesting.

Organizations that work on arts and culture also have redefined their space following the uprisings, as they look to enter into political discussions and debates on freedom. In Egypt, for example, artistic spaces such as Darb 1718 and the Townhouse Gallery complement important actors in the performing arts, such as the theater troupe Al Warsha, the Studio Emad Eddin Foundation, and the El Mastaba Center. An annual festival, Panorama of the European Film, brings global cinema to the old theaters of central Cairo, while the annual Downtown Contemporary Art Festival held in Cairo every spring also serves as a voice for the arts.

Such activities can be seen across the region: examples include the Munathara Initiative's pan-Arab online and television debate shows, the Al-Harah Theater, the Palestinian Performing Arts Network, or the graffiti street art of the Women on Walls initiative. Numerous Arab film directors recently have become more politically vocal and garnered international recognition, including Sara Ishaq for her film *Karama Has No Walls* and Jehane Noujaim for her film *The Square*.

It is true that traditional human rights actors are still working to influence the international community by lobbying major capitals, holding awareness campaigns at United Nations (UN) summits, and cooperating with international NGO partners. However, as a whole, civil society in the region is shifting to smaller-scale, locally focused operations. Their nascent priorities are local partnerships and communities, local engagement, and domestic opinion.

In short, the region's new civil society is not to be found lobbying in the halls of the UN, but rather is engaging in a variety of locally directed endeavors. To maintain some semblance of collective organization in challenging circumstances, civic society takes a variety of forms. This new activism includes small, closed Facebook groups of young women supporting each other as they defy traditional norms to step out on their own and lead independent lives. Such activism is found in the local council elections started and supported through hashtags and online crowdfunding in Beirut. It is the summit that takes place annually in Cairo to bring together start-ups from all over the region. It is the app that connects blood banks and their donors. It is the theater collective that uses performing arts to advocate for freedom of expression across the region—including Syria—empowering artists and performers and building awareness in their own communities.

There are many other examples as well. This civic activism is the region-wide debate bringing young people together via social media platforms to discuss issues pertinent to them, including the self-proclaimed Islamic State. It is the small local paper that engages a student union community in efforts to research and look into international rules on human rights, gender equality, and children's rights. It is the charitable worker in Cairo who approaches three major companies and an online NGO networking site about training street children in carpentry to give them skills and gainful employment. It is the small, Cairo-based organization that launches web and phone apps to track and monitor enforced disappearances.

Another major trend among MENA civic activists is that—with war rampant in many parts of the region—many small local organizations have cropped up to provide humanitarian relief. They aim to deliver basic services without the bureaucracy and political baggage of the international NGOs working in the region. Most of these groups are found in the vicinity of the Syrian civil war, now in its sixth year, working in countries like Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, and Turkey. They have also begun to appear amid other conflicts in the region that also demand

humanitarian responses, such as those in Libya and Yemen, where international NGOs have a very limited presence.

This new civil society has taken shape because local citizens see international aid missions as ineffective—or, worse, politically compromised. The humanitarian response in Syria has become so heavily politicized at the European Union, UN, and other international organizations that local community organizations have effectively taken over.

These groups work for very little compensation, provide immediate emergency relief, and fall very much under the radar of major donor groups. New local activists deploy a range of activities and resources such as community gatherings, meetings at places of worship, religious charity drives, safe houses, Facebook and wider social media, and collaborations with entrepreneurs who specialize in technology. Various modes of crowdsourcing—online and offline, for both human and financial capital—are increasingly used to support civil society in Syria. These groups negotiate with various armed rebel groups to ensure food and services are distributed.

## **EGYPT: ACTIVISM ATTACKED**

Egypt provides a particularly vivid case of a new civil society emerging—and then being cut down by an authoritarian state and its security forces. Egypt demonstrates both the importance of these civic trends, but also how difficult it is to sustain the civic sphere's spirit of unity.

Today, Western media headlines about Egyptian civil society focus on the best-known activists of the human rights community and the continued crackdown against international NGOs that has gradually intensified since 2011. Government targeting of foreign funding has spread to local Egyptian groups too. This issue is so politicized and has had such a devastating effect on internationally prominent human rights activists that it has elicited responses from senior U.S. government officials, including then president Barack Obama, as well as from then UN secretary-general Ban Ki-Moon.<sup>11</sup> Despite the widespread criticism, the government of Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi seems unlikely to stop seeking to close down civil society. NGO assets have been frozen. Open travel bans are in place, extending well beyond the legal limits for such restrictions. And as the list of targeted individuals grows, the courts are accepting very few appeals from NGOs. Meanwhile, a propaganda war against rights campaigners is gaining more traction with Egypt's domestic audience.

In terms of responding to government repression, for a long time, the international community helped its local NGO partners try to prevent Egypt from replacing a 2002 law on civic associations with an even more repressive statute. The current government introduced numerous drafts for a new, much more draconian law, but it delayed passage and implementation until November 2016, when the parliament passed a harsh new law that threatens to eviscer-

ate Egyptian civil society. If approved by the president, this law will leave virtually no civil society organization untouched. The state would judge civil society organizations on what kind of activities they undertake, not just on whether they are registered. The law is framed in such a way that it could be used to ban almost all autonomous civil society activities. Moreover, it looks retroactively to target many of the most prominent rights-led NGOs in Egypt today, primarily through pending legal charges against them.

These new measures, alongside various other legal amendments since 2013, significantly increase the level of danger that civil society organizations face. Charges have become much more severe than they were when the Egyptian government opened cases against international NGOs and their workers in 2012. Penalties of illegally receiving foreign funds will carry a possible one-to-five-year prison term.<sup>12</sup> A new counterterrorism law, meanwhile, looks set to criminalize NGO engagement with foreign entities and organizations. Parts of this law are kept deliberately vague, meaning threats could arise at any time for more or less any reason.

While the government has focused on individuals and groups in the human rights sector that the state has implicated in criminal investigations, the constricted legal status of NGOs menaces the whole of Egyptian civil society. The security apparatus has effectively taken over the management and allocation of NGO funding and project programming—under the purview of the Ministry of Social Solidarity. Projects up and down the country—including even small development initiatives on water services and well construction—are being denied funding and project approval. Even prominent parliamentarians with their own long-standing and respected development NGOs have had to shut down their activities and organizations, due to an inability to obtain necessary work permissions from the government. Unlike internationally prominent human rights NGOs, small community-oriented civil society initiatives cannot count on continued international support to help them survive.

## CONCLUSION

As a whole, Arab civil society feels burned by the experiences of the past five years, and activists in Egypt are a particularly notable example of this disillusion. There has been much hope and motivation and yet even more despair, as local groups have struggled to recalibrate and reorganize in the face of authoritarian backlash, and in some places, full-blown civil war. The confused and at times strained relationship between civil society actors and the international community has not helped the former adapt successfully—a trend, again, seen in especially heightened form in Egypt.

Many new civic groups in the MENA region are focusing on their own agency and very specific concerns; gone are the days of fighting for nationwide or regional solidarity and grand pan-Arab agendas. As communities across the region have moved away from broader goals

of democratic change and constitutional reform, social movements have begun to focus on empowering citizens in their daily lives on the issues that most affect them. The economic situation has become a region-wide problem and thus drives the most ardent awareness campaigns. That is not to say work on democracy and human rights is nonexistent, but rather that it increasingly is seeking to return to its base: communities and smaller societal groups. New forms of activism in Egypt and elsewhere in the region are becoming more and more associated with this locally rooted concept of agency and are organizing in ways that reflect this shifting concern.

## *INDIA: INNOVATION AMID ADVERSITY*

*Vijayan MJ*

In India, a particularly rich range of new civic activism has taken center stage in recent years. This is the product of growing economic inequalities, social injustice, and the illiberal policies of the current government. It also grows out of local communities' frustration with the failings of political parties, the intelligentsia, and established nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). This diversity of new activism bodes well for Indian democracy, even if the current political situation gives reason for such deep concern.

### **DRIVING FORCES OF INDIA'S NEW CIVIL SOCIETY**

India's neoliberal economic transformation and changes to the traditional welfare state have driven a surge in activity among social movements. Trade unions have been weakened with the rise of contract-based, informal employment bereft of labor rights protections. Social movements have filled the gap in an attempt to draw attention to the inequities of the country's economic development. As it has become apparent that India's economic growth is leaving large swathes of the population behind, social tensions and concerns have become sharper.

In parallel to this changing economic model has been the growth of India's current ruling party—the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP has fomented polarization, seeking to create divisions between Hindus and minority communities like Muslims and

Christians. It tends to promote a strident, revisionist version of India's glorious Hindu past and often has encouraged sectarian confrontation. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has overseen the intimidation of minorities, *dalits* (untouchables), *adivasis* (indigenous peoples), and women. There have been thousands of instances of communal violence in recent years.<sup>13</sup> State-perpetrated killings have increased in frequency. In one typical example, in October 2016, police killed four *adivasis*, who were part of an unarmed struggle against a thermal power plant's land grab in the state of Jharkhand.<sup>14</sup>

More than 3,000 activists and community leaders across the country were being held without charges or trial as of January 2016.<sup>15</sup> Even the intelligentsia and other elite members of civil society are not safe, as they are labeled unpatriotic if they critique government policies. The Modi government regularly prevents activists from traveling abroad to participate in international meetings. This local intimidation is less well-known than the government's targeting of large international NGOs, yet its effects are more widespread.

Crucially, these circumstances have begun to have a major impact on how Indian civil society operates. Initially, as economic liberalization advanced, mainstream Indian NGOs adapted to foreign funding cycles, rules, and priorities. To attract funds, many Indian NGOs became service providers. They also focused on issues like healthcare that dovetailed with international and Indian governmental agendas. The nature of India's civic society is now evolving dramatically as a new form of locally rooted activism takes shape.

## **EMERGING GROUPS IN INDIAN CIVIL SOCIETY**

The striking diversity and range of India's emerging activism shows that these changes are structural, not limited to one or two particular policy issues. Dynamic new civic campaigns have gained momentum on multiple issues, including land rights, climate change, sexual harassment, corruption, poverty, caste discrimination, labor issues, Kashmir, and personal rights.

On the issue of land rights, new movements are organizing to oppose land-acquisition efforts aimed at privatizing natural resources that lead to evictions in forest and coastal areas across the country. This has given birth to a new countrywide land rights movement, with land reclamation at its core. This movement has succeeded in reclaiming significant amounts of land for community-oriented agriculture. Community-led campaigns have pushed hard for implementation of the 2006 Forest Rights Act, which gives communities more legal rights to the land they live on and cultivate. These movements have experienced some of the worst violence the state has unleashed. They keep a low profile and focus on very specific land reclamation battles. In a slightly more high-profile move, a number of land rights struggles have joined together under the banner of Bhoomi Adhikar Andolan (the Land Rights Movement).

Climate-driven activism is also changing. There are now numerous high-profile movements focusing on climate change throughout the country. India's new climate warriors are not individuals who get paid to organize flash mobs and climate justice rallies or people who get to attend international climate change negotiations. Rather, they are self-organized local communities fighting greenfield mining projects. They are indigenous communities living at the sites of state and private-sector initiatives that aim to extract valuable natural resources. These local communities are being backed up by new youth brigades that, dubbing themselves solidarity groups, engage in anti-mining, anti-dam, anti-nuclear, and anti-thermal struggles. These groups have technological skills to help local communities' stories reach a national audience. In recent years, these local movements have won many battles, such as stopping a Tata automobile plant in West Bengal in October 2008, scrapping a Vedanta bauxite mining operation in the Niyamgiri Hills in August 2010, and blocking a POSCO steel plant in the village of Dinkia in July 2015.<sup>16</sup>

Much local self-organization is a response to increasing levels of state violence. New forms of old democratic movements have emerged in India's interior against the violent repression unleashed on movements for *adivasi* assertiveness—which have occurred in the state of Chhattisgarh, for example—led by tribal leaders like Manish Kunjam and Soni Sori. The government is also targeting Maoist rebels, and many communities are ending up caught in the cross fire—many suspect the conflict between the state and the Maoists serves as a cloak for the government to intimidate minorities pushing for stronger rights protection and local democracy.

In the past few years, India has also seen an upsurge in student and youth activism. This is a response in particular to government moves to privatize and increasingly control education, although it also focuses on other political issues. The movements based at the Film and Television Institute of India, Hyderabad Central University, and Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU) are examples of particularly prominent student activism.

These campaigns have elicited draconian government responses. The president of the JNU Students' Union was arrested on spurious sedition charges in February 2016.<sup>17</sup> The state has been implicated in the intimidation of *dalit* students who have experienced and fought against caste prejudice. The government has also moved to take action against students for criticizing the role of the Indian state in Kashmir.<sup>18</sup> In response, student activism has become more radical and increasingly engages beyond educational issues, focusing on the worrying condition of Indian democracy more generally.

Strikingly, the traditionally pliant and less-politically active Indian middle class has also become more involved in a range of social movements. The middle class has been prominent in the anti-corruption movements that have sprung up in recent years, particularly the India Against Corruption movement that has attracted so much national and international me-

dia attention. This movement lost momentum when it decided to seek political power and founded the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), which translates as the Common Man or Ordinary Person Party; the new party was not able to convert the groundswell of support effectively into votes in the 2014 national election. While the AAP did gain a huge majority in the 2015 Delhi Assembly election, the anti-corruption social movements have more recently and more generally lost their shine.

Another prominent new area of civic activism in India is the anti-rape movement that started spontaneously after the widely reported gang rape and murder of a middle-class young woman in Delhi in 2012—a movement that subsequently spread across several cities.<sup>19</sup> This generated media outcry and a national debate, in time leading to more cases of sexual violence and assault being reported and the police and the state being strongly critiqued for not tackling the issue. This in turn prompted the formulation of a new national anti-rape law and a much-needed public debate on sexual harassment in India. However, since some of those involved in this movement often demanded castration or capital punishment for the accused, it was somewhat problematic from a human rights perspective. Critics complain that rapes of *adivasi* or *dalit* women outside the capital city have received much less attention than attacks against middle-class Delhi women.

Aside from India's debate about sexual harassment, several new trade unions have formed in an effort to dissociate labor activism from party politics and link it more tightly to grassroots concerns. One example is the New Trade Union Initiative (NTUI), which has affiliate groups in many organized and nonorganized employment sectors. These initiatives have brought new energy and new actors into labor activism, and these movements have been actively involved in many strikes in the last two years. These new trade unions are faring well among new sectors of unorganized labor, such as gas cylinder distributors, food delivery workers, couriers, street vendors, and hawkers. They are more closely associated with grassroots social activism than with political parties—a major change for Indian trade unions.

Beyond formal labor activism, other employment and livelihood struggles have emerged. These movements are typically decentralized and local but also coordinated by national campaigns, like the activism that helped bring about the Right to Food campaign and the 2005 Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Act—which promises a minimum of 100 days per year of employment to rural laborers who cannot find work.<sup>20</sup> Other examples include the Pensioners' Forum and the One Rank One Pension movement of former defense service personnel seeking equal pensions. India's new civic activism is not just about youth.

Since 2015, meanwhile, new *dalit* identity movements have triggered and channeled community anger against both enduring caste hierarchies and the government. Caste segregation is worsening, and *dalits* are suffering regular attacks by upper-caste Hindu brigades. New *dalit*

movements, like that in the city of Una in Gujarat, are resisting and standing up to demand their rights, as they build alliances with other marginalized communities.

Elsewhere, the self-determination movement has found new ideas among Kashmir's young stone-pelting protesters. This movement flared up in July 2016 when Indian armed forces killed Burhan Wani, a young self-styled militant leader.<sup>21</sup> The movement is strikingly nonhierarchical, leaderless, and participatory. The Indian state's response has been violent and repressive, in what is already a highly militarized region.

Another recent development has been the strengthening of India's LGBT movement, which has discovered a hitherto unknown confidence in holding gay pride marches across the country in metropolitan cities. Some powerful judgments from the courts in India helped enable this change, including the Delhi High Court's decision to decriminalize homosexuality in 2009 (which was subsequently reversed in 2013 by an appeal to the Supreme Court, a decision that is currently under review).<sup>22</sup> There has been talk of a new rainbow coalition between LGBT groups and leftist social movements.

## **NOTABLE FEATURES OF INDIA'S CIVIC ACTIVISM**

These many manifestations of new activism in India have a number of significant features. This activism flows from the particularly active participation of young people and women across the country, something that is hugely encouraging for the future of its democracy. A number of movements display strong levels of female leadership, including on many issues that are not gender specific. Notable women—like Soni Sori, who is leading the struggle against the attack on indigenous people in central India; Sukalo, who is leading the forest people's land reclamation efforts in the Sonbhadra District in Uttar Pradesh State; and Irom Sharmila, who is leading the anti-militarization struggle in the northeastern state of Manipur—have become icons among new activists.

These new movements aspire to bring about faster results as well. Unlike the movements of yesteryear, new activists are less willing to wait patiently for state cooperation and benevolence. The movements are unarmed and strategic in their use of nonviolence, which they have stuck to in the face of intense levels of violence that state agencies have meted out.

These activist movements are also much more overtly political, with many young activists openly aspiring to become political leaders that make a difference and operate differently. This is a new development, as such political aspirations for power were deemed unacceptable by more classic movements in the past. Today, young leaders see a need and the possibility to go into the political system and change it from the inside, unlike old social movements that preferred an outsider approach to pressuring the state.

In addition, these movements effectively use media resources, forms of cultural expression, and technology, as part and parcel of their strategies. In response, amid many conflagrations, the government has moved to shut down Internet and mobile services to curtail activism. Yet there are movements like anti-mining struggles in the state of Jharkhand that use social media more selectively, adopting such tools when they suit their mobilization purposes and refraining when they become a hindrance.

Most new civic activists have refused patronage from big NGOs and assistance providers. They fear that the NGO mode of operation would undermine their own effectiveness, and they suspect the older NGOs want to take control of the new activism for their own benefit.

## **CONCLUSION**

India's new civic activism is at a crossroads. On the one hand, there has been an unprecedented rise of the Hindu nationalist far right, which threatens the progress India's seventy-year-old democracy has achieved. On the other hand, India is pulsating with the newfound vigor of social activists—including women, young people, and oppressed people in particular—who are more determined than ever to fight for their rights.

Looking ahead, every upcoming state election, as well as the next round of general elections in 2019, will be a litmus test—for political parties, and equally for social movements and activists, for whom the stakes are getting higher in the battle for democracy. If political trends continue to deepen in the same direction, the impulse behind new forms of activism probably will strengthen—and Indian civil society likely will become even more contentious and turbulent.

## *KENYA: ADAPTING TO POLITICAL EBBS AND FLOWS*

*Adams Oloo*

In Kenya, civic activism has adapted in a myriad of ways to a changed political context. Civil society has taken on different forms and targeted different issues as political reform has advanced and ebbed. Civic activism has become more effective and more sophisticated, while retaining at least some of its older features. Yet the price of this effectiveness is a campaign by the current government to quash the new activism. Tough times lie ahead for Kenyan civil society, and civic activism will need to further adapt.<sup>23</sup>

### **CIVIC ACTIVISM AND KENYA'S INDEPENDENCE MOVEMENT**

In the 1950s and early 1960s, Kenya had a vibrant civil society that was involved in the country's independence struggle. However, after independence was achieved in 1963, the regime led by then president Jomo Kenyatta until 1978 moved to cripple civil society in the name of nation building. Civil society organizations were compelled to concentrate on apolitical developmental activities, and consequently they became increasingly subdued and largely concentrated on augmenting the state's economic development efforts.

When he came to power in 1978, the subsequent president, Daniel arap Moi, picked up where Kenyatta left off, and in 1982, he legalized a one-party state that would last until the early 1990s. Moi was even more ferocious in curtailing the activities of most civil society

groups. These organizations were deregistered, co-opted, banned, or closely monitored. Only the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCCK) and the Law Society of Kenya managed to stay above the fray and retain any meaningful operational autonomy. These repressive political conditions meant that Kenyan activists were concerned overwhelmingly with pressing for basic freedoms.

Until recently, Kenyan civic activism was dominated by two groups: those that opposed and confronted the state and advocated for liberty and social justice, and those that partnered with the state and focused on developmental issues. The organizations that stood up to the state were drawn from both the political class and civil society. On the political side, these actors included the Kenya African Democratic Union and the Kenya People's Union, some renegade politicians from the ruling party—the Kenya African National Union (KANU)—and trade unions that bargained for members' rights against a recalcitrant state.

The most active civil society activists, meanwhile, came from a number of religious groups. Prominent among these were vocal clerics from the Anglican Church of Kenya, the Catholic Church of Kenya, the Presbyterian Church of East Africa, and various indigenous African religious groups. Respected institutions like the NCCCK and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission joined individual clerics in their quest for social justice. During this period, tools of civic activism included pastoral letters and critical Sunday sermons, sit-ins, street demonstrations, underground political movements (during the one-party era), and partnerships with opposition parties.<sup>24</sup>

## **A SHIFT IN KENYA'S CIVIC ACTIVISM**

Kenya's 2002 general elections spurred a transition to a new type of civic activism, characterized by a substantial shift in political power and a weaker form of civil society. The ruling KANU party lost power to the National Rainbow Coalition (NARC). The new NARC government immediately co-opted key civil society leaders and operatives into the administration, which dramatically undermined the strength of civil society. Most Kenyan civil society organizations heavily relied on their leaders and key personnel, and they had relatively weak institutional resilience. With key figures moving into government, the civic sphere was left in crisis. Moreover, those that remained active in civil society were reluctant to side with the KANU, now the official opposition party, in exerting any critical pressure on the new government.

This vacuum and caution became even more pronounced when a coalition government was formed after the contested 2007 elections. This coalition was necessary as part of a peace deal after lethal violence broke out between supporters of the Party of National Unity (PNU) under Kenya's third president, Mwai Kibaki (2002–2013), and the Orange Democratic Movement

under Raila Odinga, who would serve as prime minister from 2008 to 2013. The nature of the coalition and the absence of deeply rooted peace further militated against vigorous civic activism.

## **NEW AREAS OF CIVIC ACTIVISM**

The hollowing out of Kenya's traditional civil society has provided the context for a new strain of civic activism to take shape.

Dealing with the fallout from a new wave of violence was a challenge. The aftermath of the disputed 2007 elections left over 1,000 people dead and up to 500,000 displaced.<sup>25</sup> Many more people suffered injury and rape. National and international organizations took on victims' legal cases, which have become a focal point of civil society in a country struggling to come to terms with the violence.

In reaction, parts of Kenyan society—especially in the Muslim-dominated coastal areas—have begun radicalizing. The influence of movements dominated by radical clerics and radicalized youth has resulted in a rise in extrajudicial vengeance killings. Rights-based organizations have begun concentrating on containing this frightening new trend, particularly in the coastal city of Mombasa.

Beyond the violence, more structural shifts related to Kenyan political identities have affected the country's civil society. Kenya has witnessed the rise of noninstitutionalized networks of groups and individuals that are struggling to expand understandings of politics and bring about social change in terms of behavior, relationships, and ideas. While shared political values provide some cohesion to social movement networks, the fact that such activists and organizations act on and through shared political identities knits each movement together. Individuals such as photojournalist Boniface Mwangi and activist Okiya Omtata, who is frequently at the justice ministry seeking court orders on public interest matters, have become forces in their own right.

As Kenya has made progress on basic political rights, activists have given greater priority to social rights. This has spurred action on issues ranging from economic rights to property rights, food security, and the cost of living. In reaction to the dearth of progress on these rights, civil society groups have increasingly petitioned members of parliament on social matters, using new tactics that rely on image and symbolism. One example was a 2013 campaign that caricatured members of parliament as pigs to demonstrate that they are greedy at the expense of ordinary citizens.<sup>26</sup> Other groups have styled their activism as the Unga Revolution—Unga maize being Kenya's most basic food, which many now cannot afford.

In terms of new tactics, as elsewhere in the world, activists in Kenya have turned increasingly to social media. Both opposition and pro-government bloggers have become prominent and

influential. Activists have flooded Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube with various campaigns, to such an extent that they set the agenda for the mainstream media. The Kenyan government has become so uncomfortable with the influence of oppositional social media that it is now exploring legal measures to regulate such platforms.

Some new forms of activism favor very formal legal mechanisms, such as the courts. This is because Kenya's 2010 constitution elaborated a bill of rights. Civic activists have turned to litigation and court injunctions to compel the government to take certain actions or to block certain government activities. The formal mechanisms of the rule of law are now tools for civic activists in the quest for social justice in a way that was never previously the case.

Civil society in Kenya has faced a tumultuous time under the current Kenyatta Jubilee regime. Since it came to power in 2013, this government has intensified efforts to undermine civil society groups. It has done this through administrative harassment; the threat of deregistration; a sustained campaign to tarnish activists' reputation by portraying them as unpatriotically serving the interests of foreign paymasters; and legislation that caps the amount of money that civil society organizations can receive from donors.

## **SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES**

Not everything has changed in Kenyan civil society. There are many similarities between today's civic activism and that of previous periods. Much activism still focuses on core development issues through a familiar form of advocacy. Activists might use new technology but their substantive concerns are not entirely different, at least in the context of Kenya's persistent basic development challenges. Much of today's activism takes the form of workshops, petitions, and demonstrations, just as in the past.

Today's civic activism in Kenya also relies on the same kind of partnerships between sectors of civil society, just as in the postindependence period. Faith groups, academic bodies, and many other civic sectors still prioritize the creation of unifying umbrella organizations to amplify their voices. If anything, the mobilization of these multistakeholder partnerships has become more central to the new type of activism.

Despite these continuities, however, aspects of today's civic activism have changed radically in Kenya.

The expanded use of social media to communicate and determine the political agenda and to shape the mainstream media has been truly staggering for a country that is still relatively underdeveloped. This change has gone hand in hand with more individualized activism that is different from the institutionalized activism of yesteryear. It is now the norm that the activi-

ties of individual bloggers are more prominent than the activities of the NCKK or the Kenya Human Rights Commission—even though the latter still carry out more substantive activities that should have a more durable impact. New activism also makes more use of art, poetry, and symbolic imagery to supplement more traditional forms of direct advocacy.

Moreover, there is now more of a balance between elite civic groups and grassroots participants. This represents a significant change for a country in which elites used to heavily dominate civil society. Conversely, under the new activism, there is a much more striking disconnect between civil society groups and opposition parties—indeed, most of the time, these two sets of actors are at cross-purposes and in competition. This is a departure from the 1980s and 1990s, when civil society and the opposition worked in tandem against a repressive authoritarian regime. And, finally, the new activism is dominated by young people, whereas the old activism was dominated by middle-aged and more experienced individuals.

Through these changes, new activism has proved more successful in a number of areas. In many instances, it has won court injunctions against the government—using litigation tools that were either not available or could not be effectively utilized in previous years. Activists are now more adept at building alliances with pro-reform legislators and state officials. They protest, but they also work to build more practical partnerships with other actors than before. In addition, new activism has been successful in its new modus operandi of embarrassing and shaming the political class or the government of the day. Activists' use of live pigs in their 2013 demonstrations that portrayed members of parliament as greedy, their extensive use of graffiti, and other forms of symbolism have attracted attention both nationally and internationally.<sup>27</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Despite the challenges posed by Kenya's current government, the country's civil society has remained largely steadfast and has transformed itself by deploying new forms of civic activism. As long as the Jubilee regime remains in power, civil activism will continue to struggle with the state machinery's legally insulated financial onslaught and closure of spaces for activism. Likewise, the mix of rapprochement and tension between civil society and opposition parties is likely to continue; there is a dearth of individuals and institutions that can hold them together as was common in the past. The future forms and causes of activism are likely to revolve around sporadic governance-related campaigns and issues related to human and basic rights. This new activism will be increasingly multifaceted, as individuals, informal networks, and formal organizations coexist, sometimes in cooperation and often in competition.



## THAILAND: POLITICALLY DIVIDED CIVIC ACTIVISM

*Janjira Sombatpoonsiri*

Over the past decade, Thailand's civil society has been caught up in a conflict over who holds political legitimacy in the country. As a result, these civic actors are divided into two political camps: red shirts and yellow shirts. Each camp has staged tit-for-tat street protests to overthrow a government representing the opposing side. This has deepened polarization and set the tone for the country's civic space. The political divide has been the catalyst for new civic activism. It has led to unorthodox alliances—between aristocratic elites, the urban middle class, and some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) for the yellow shirts, and between political parties and grassroots movements for the red shirts.

A 2014 military coup ousted the red-shirt government of then prime minister Yingluck Shinawatra and led to the installation of a military regime that continues to govern today. Since then, numerous student and pro-democracy movements have emerged, carrying out creative protests against the military regime, as the latter backs away from its promise to reinstate democracy. These movements have faced repression and their campaigns have failed to attract widespread popular support due to the polarization between the red and yellow political camps. New forms of activism in Thailand now struggle with a regime that is increasingly authoritarian and that appears to be increasingly secure in power.

## ORIGINS OF THAILAND'S POLITICAL DIVIDE

Thailand's decade-long conflict between red shirts and yellow shirts is the result of a complex mix of factors, including the historical dominance of feudal elites in Thai politics, the country's political openness in the 1990s, and economic growth that has empowered a new set of political actors and challenged the prevailing national ideology.

In the early 2000s, a media tycoon turned-politician named Thaksin Shinawatra rose to power, threatening traditional elites' interests and ideological hegemony. As Thailand's prime minister from 2001 until 2006, he endorsed the red-shirt crusade against the yellow-shirt movement.

The mobilization of red shirts has been based on a loose, horizontal grassroots network mainly in rural areas, especially in the provincial strongholds of Thaksin-backed parties. The leading politicians of the Thaksin-sponsored political party have stood at the center of this network. The movement has exploited existing national and local administrative structures to recruit its members and run its campaigns. Local political canvassers and residents of *tambon* (or sub-district administrative units) at times serve as heads of the red-shirt movement's local branches. Like their yellow counterparts, the red shirts are equipped with their own media outlets, particularly community radio stations. Leftist activists, low-ranking security officers, pro-democracy students, and academics, as well as workers and farmers frustrated with being socially and economically excluded have also aligned themselves with the red shirts.

By contrast, the yellow shirts largely consist of traditional elites and the urban middle class. The yellow shirts are generally skeptical of democratic procedures and values, and they are highly critical of the corruption perpetrated by Thaksin-backed elected governments. The yellow-shirt movement is made up of an unorthodox alliance among groups such as: nationalistic royalists, retired and incumbent generals, bureaucrats, senior judges, media tycoons, allied business leaders, fundamentalist Buddhist groups, public sector unions, professional associations, and well-established NGOs like the Consumers' Association, as well as conservative academics, artists, and celebrities.

More recently, there has been greater uncertainty surrounding the future of Thailand's divided political landscape, following the October 2016 death of the country's long-time monarch, King Bhumibol, who was widely popular and seen as a unifying force.

## RED- AND YELLOW-SHIRT DEMONSTRATIONS

The yellow shirts took to the streets in 2005–2006, 2008, and 2013–2014 to oppose and eventually remove red shirt-backed governments that repeatedly had won elections.

Their protests in 2005–2006 and 2008 took place mainly in Bangkok. In contrast, the 2013–2014 protests mobilized a vast number of participants from the upper part of Thailand’s southern region, which is the permanent base of support for the country’s pro–yellow shirt Democrat Party. This party’s key figures spearheaded the 2013–2014 demonstrations. These later protests also saw the increased involvement of militant royalist groups that engaged in armed clashes with the police and red shirts.

These periods of yellow-shirt protests resulted each time in military or judicial coups. The 2005–2006 protests led to the Thai military overthrowing the Thaksin-led government, while the 2008 protests influenced the verdict of Thailand’s Constitutional Court that disbanded the pro-Thaksin People Power Party.<sup>28</sup> Soon after, the government coalition collapsed, enabling the opposition party to form a new ruling coalition.

In response, the red shirts staged major demonstrations in 2009 and 2010. The movement formed in the aftermath of Thaksin’s ouster. It has attempted to address the social injustice inflicted on the popular classes by those labeled Thai aristocrats, to support economic liberalization, and to spread the concept of democracy. It appears that red shirts’ definition of democracy is largely limited to the principle of one man, one vote—with little emphasis on checks and balances to constrain the majority. In Thailand’s feudal context, this principle became the red shirts’ ideological banner, attracting support from the large rural population long subjugated under the yoke of aristocratic elites.

In 2010, as the red shirts stepped up their protests, the army was brought in to avert a large-scale popular revolt. The clampdown left almost 100 dead and around 2,000 injured.<sup>29</sup> This increased the movement’s popularity and accelerated its growth, which translated into the 2011 electoral victory of Thaksin’s new proxy political party, under the leadership of his sister Yingluck Shinawatra.

Yellow shirts took to the street again in 2013, vowing to completely overhaul the electoral democracy that brought Thaksin’s newly formed party—the Pheu Thai Party—back to power in the 2011 election. And they succeeded. Six-month-long yellow-shirt protests and street clashes convinced the army to step in ostensibly to save Thailand from civil war.<sup>30</sup>

Both red and yellow shirts rely on nonviolent methods of protest. Movement leaders often refer to their activism as *santi ahimsa*, comprising public assemblies, marches, symbolic defiance, and noncooperation through other tactics such as tax boycotts. These protests can be highly disruptive, aiming to block public access to main roads, state offices, government buildings, the parliament, police headquarters, and international airports. These tactics require massive numbers of protesters to be concentrated at these locations. Such demonstrations frequently generate a perception that society is descending into chaos.

The result of all these tit-for-tat street protests is that Thai civil society today is defined overwhelmingly in terms of this division between red shirts and yellow shirts. The political struggle between the two camps has driven new forms of activism, and it has largely defined the nature of Thailand's civic space.

## **CIVIC ACTIVISM AFTER THE 2014 COUP**

Despite the 2014 coup leaders' promise to restore national unity, Thai society remains divided. The difference between before and after the coup is that conflict is now swept under the rug. The military government has imposed a host of laws to curb citizens' right to public assembly and freedom of expression. This may convince red shirts and Thaksin's associates to halt their activism, at least temporarily.

Nevertheless, these political conditions are an important motivation driving students, academics, seasoned activists, and ordinary citizens alike to fight for democracy in innovative ways. Newly organized anti-junta movements include: student networks like Dao Din, the New Democracy Movement, and other groups scattered across Thailand; initiatives involving progressive lawyers, like iLaw and Thai Lawyers for Human Rights; groups of academics, such as the Thai Academic Network for Civic Rights; and NGOs and groups of villagers affected by the junta's policy inefficiency, like the Thai Health Promotion Movement and the Andaman Sea Protection Group. There also is a battery of very informally organized groups comprising journalists, designers, and marketing strategists (one example being a movement called Resistant Citizen).

These groups and networks are characteristically ad hoc due to the ongoing crackdown. At times, they coordinate their protest actions, but without much of an organizational structure. They generally rely on symbolic and creative hit-and-run protest methods such as flash mobs and street theater. They campaigned against the junta's draft constitution that was successfully passed in an August 2016 referendum.<sup>31</sup> Notably, some NGO groups that had previously participated in the yellow-shirt movement joined the campaign against the draft constitution because they opposed its undemocratic content. This campaign failed to attract sufficient popular support to win.

Aside from Thailand's military junta, King Bhumibol's death in October 2016 was a watershed moment in the country's politics. The charismatic king who had consolidated networks of feudal elites for the past seventy years is now gone. And because he was loved by most Thais, the nation has been in grief. Any civic activism unrelated to the king's death has been viewed as inappropriate. People have monitored one another's behavior, making sure that all Thais express love and respect for the late king. This has led to witch hunts. For instance, individuals who did not wear black at the start of the mourning period were shamed in public. Those who

posted any social media messages that were perceived to insult the late king were physically attacked and reported to the police on charges of *lèse-majesté* (offending the monarchy). This charge has also been used against many activists as a political tool to further silence dissidence.

## THE FUTURE OF THAI POLITICS AND CIVIC ACTIVISM

Civic activism over the past decade has shaped Thai politics in at least three ways. First, the red and the yellow protests have deepened the country's political bifurcation. Second, the new activism has gotten a far wider range of the Thai population participating in public debates and assemblies—even if the current military regime has subsequently constrained this development. Third, the latest wave of activism after the 2014 coup reflects the resilience of pro-democracy movements and the extraordinary dynamism of young people. Efforts to fashion new kinds of civic organization sustain collective hope amid the dark times of authoritarianism and the uncertain aftermath of King Bhumibol's death.

What is particularly new to Thailand is the increasingly fuzzy boundary between state actors, political parties, and civil society. These actors increasingly coalesce along the divide between the red and yellow camps. Whether electoral democracy is good or bad has become one of the main questions separating the two sides, as has whether emerging civic activism can play a role in bridging the divide between the two political camps.

## CONCLUSION

Despite this depressing trend of increased authoritarianism, the current regime is not without weaknesses. The new king is less revered by the Thai public than his father. The ideological façade of the ruling elites may be weakened. In addition, the regime has promised to hold a national election sometime in 2018. This opens an opportunity for social movements and political parties to craft an election campaign that can defeat representatives of the regime. While the color-coded divide remains the key obstacle for collaboration across the aisle, some groups—including students, for instance—are trying to reach out to disappointed regime supporters. The coming election will be a test of whether this civic endeavor to bridge the gap of political division can succeed.



## *TUNISIA: ACTIVISM ON THE RISE*

*Youssef Cherif*

Since the uprising that ousted then president Zine el-Abidine Ben Ali in January 2011, Tunisia has become a breeding ground for new types of civic activism. While many movements originated before 2011, their overall numbers and influence has grown as the authoritarian state has given way to a more democratic environment. Media liberalization has helped give civil society a higher national and international profile. The continued vitality displayed in the Tunisian streets has been leading many observers to say that the spirit of the 2011 revolution continues today as civic activism takes on a broader range of organizational forms.

If Tunisia represents one of civil society's greatest success stories, however, the state of play for its development is not entirely rosy—the country's new activism exhibits clear weaknesses, as well as strengths.

### **THE REORDERING OF TUNISIAN CIVIL SOCIETY**

Tunisia's public space has become increasingly vibrant but also polarized between secularists and Islamists. Particularly in the lead-up to the country's 2014 elections, civil society organizations were employed to serve one side or the other, even if they were ostensibly dedicated to social or other apolitical issues. Many political parties, as well as the country's main trade union, the General Tunisian Labor Union (UGTT), sought to harness thousands of small social movements for the political battle between secularist parties and the Islamist Ennahdha Party.

Since the two sides formed a coalition government in 2015, the degree of civil society's polarization has decreased. The UGTT—extremely influential in Tunisia—still tries to organize and direct social movements. Interestingly, these movements often take up causes and campaigns first, and then the UGTT aligns itself with these activities later. In general, however, today there is less overt politicization of civil society than there was two or three years ago. Most campaigns and protests now emerge spontaneously; they maintain more of a distance from long-standing nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), unions, and political parties—and they are largely peaceful.

Nevertheless, the interplay of activity among social movements and the growth of radical groups are becoming defining issues in Tunisian politics. There were around 5,000 social protests in Tunisia in 2015.<sup>32</sup> Social movements have been very active throughout the country. The largest mobilizations have occurred in the following governorates:

- Gafsa, home to a large 2008 uprising;
- Kairouan;
- Kasserine, which is on the border with Algeria and is home to the Chaambi Mountains, where al-Qaeda is active;
- Kebili, another hotbed of radicalism to the south;
- Medenine, near the border with Libya, where many fighters affiliated with the self-proclaimed Islamic State originate from;
- Sfax, Tunisia's second-biggest city;
- Sidi Bouzid, where street vendor Mohamed Bouazizi set himself on fire in December 2010 and sparked the revolution;
- and Tunis, the country's capital city.

New youth organizations have formed and have become one of the most dynamic strands of emerging activism. These organizations campaign to raise political awareness, promote democracy, fight corruption, counter violent extremism, and defend minorities. They are generally registered as associations, according to Tunisian law, even if their profiles are somewhat different from those of established NGOs. Some youth organizations are very active and influential.

Islamic charities and organizations have also proliferated since 2011.<sup>33</sup> They focus on social work and promote Koranic studies and proselytism. Islamic groups are largely off the international community's radar, although they have strong roots in poor regions and neighborhoods. They have been growing in Tunisia since the late 1970s, but have expanded dramatically since

the revolution. They are financed by domestic charitable donations, as well as donations from Gulf countries. Such movements are said to be close to Ennahdha, and many secular elites and members of the security establishment view them with acute suspicion—for fear that they have links to terrorism.

A shocking, radical form of activism that has spread in recent years is suicide. Men, women, elderly people, and young people alike at times have set themselves on fire to protest specific social issues that they cannot solve. Protest suicide, in a religious society such as Tunisia, is becoming a distinctive new form of exercising civic influence. Mohamed Bouazizi is the most famous case, but there have been dozens of cases before and after him.<sup>34</sup>

## **AD HOC, TARGETED MOVEMENTS**

Many campaigns and protests in Tunisia are triggered by specific events. They are not led by registered organizations, but by small clusters of friends who are interconnected with other groups in different parts of the country. This type of mobilization has proliferated since 2011. These protests assemble dozens of people, occasionally hundreds, but rarely reach the thousands. Facebook is their organizers' main tool for advertising and communicating. The origin of these groups' funding remains opaque and the subject of conspiracy theories, due to a lack of transparency. The Tunisian media, largely biased in favor of the establishment, tends to report that these movements reflect some kind of threatening, destabilizing political agenda—whether linked to former president Moncef Marzouki's followers, the extreme leftists of the Popular Front, or radical Islamist groups such as Hizb ut-Tahrir. Some of these political parties have indeed attempted to hijack social movements, but without any obvious success.

One such movement is Winou el Pétrole? (Where is the Oil?). Its instigators suspect that the state is hiding the real value of Tunisia's oil reserves.<sup>35</sup> This initiative emerged in early 2015 after a series of reports and articles were shared on Facebook to corroborate this claim. That same year, social media campaigns and street protests on this issue, and even blockades of some oil production sites in southern Tunisia, became frequent. The movement died down in the latter half of the year.

A similar initiative is Manish Msameh (I Will Not Forgive). This campaign was formed in mid-2015 to oppose the so-called economic reconciliation bill proposed by then president Beji Caid Essebsi.<sup>36</sup> This bill would have given amnesty to some businesspeople who made fortunes under the pre-2011 regime and who are now accused of corruption. Street protests, social media campaigns, and other means pushed the president to shelve the bill.

Another movement gained attention in September 2016, when the state reclaimed a date farm in Jemna, in Kebili Governorate. The state-owned Jemna oases were taken over in 2011 by

a group of dwellers, who officially united into the Association for the Protection of Jemna's Oases.<sup>37</sup> This self-proclaimed cooperative structure managed to turn the ailing farm around and make it profitable. They refused orders from the central government in Tunis to relinquish the farm and reached out to established unions (especially the UGTT and the leading agriculture union, the Tunisian Union of Agriculture and Fisheries, or UTAP), as well as established NGOs to help them. They received the backing of these groups and that of several political parties. This obliged the central government to start negotiations over control of the farm.

Since 2011, Tunisia has also seen a growing consciousness around environmental activism and protecting UNESCO World Heritage sites. In 2013 and 2014, a garbage crisis erupted on the island of Djerba, similar to that which would later shake Beirut in 2015.<sup>38</sup> Citizen groups, business owners, and political and trade union activists coalesced in 2014 to protest against the burning of garbage on the island. This coalition forced the central government to work on alternative solutions. In Gabes, there have been protests against pollution resulting from phosphates production.<sup>39</sup> The destruction of archaeological and natural sites has ignited demonstrations in many cities as well, including the site of Carthage.

All these movements are mostly limited in size, often result from ad hoc organization, and tend to fade away after making their stand.

## LABOR-RELATED ACTIVISM

Workers asking for better wages and more rights, as well as unemployed people looking for better jobs, are staging a different, more recurrent type of civic activity. These civic activists are usually close to—but not necessarily formally affiliated with—the UGTT. Since 2011, there have been many demonstrations and strikes of this kind every month across Tunisia. They are largely peaceful, but have been damaging to the economy. These protests can be reactive, such as when a worker dies on-site or is fired. But they are usually well-organized and long-lasting. Outside of Tunis and the Sahel region, such demonstrations are accompanied by calls for equality and social justice, less *hogra* (elite contempt for ordinary citizens), and what critics term positive discrimination of what are seen as marginalized regions.

The most famous example are the Gafsa strikes that have blocked Tunisia's phosphates production several times since 2008 and that have increased in intensity since 2015.<sup>40</sup> Tunisia's main natural resource contributes significantly to the country's gross domestic product and is produced in one of its poorest regions—yet this region sees little of the revenue.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, recruitment by the state-owned company that owns the mines is plagued by tribalism, corporatism, nepotism, and corruption. This leaves many young people sidelined and angry during every recruitment season. They have been taking on more confrontational tactics recently.

Another important movement has formed in response to problems at the British gas company Petrofac. Protests almost led the company to close its plant on the Tunisian island of Kerkennah (Sfax) in 2016.<sup>42</sup> These protesters included nonunionized workers asking for better jobs, as well as unemployed individuals with no affiliation looking for jobs. Although the protesters organized effectively and made their voices heard, they failed to go further than blocking streets, chasing security forces from their island, and winning stop-gap concessions from the company.

## CONCLUSION

In short, Tunisian civil society was reborn after the end of the country's dictatorship in 2011. While old forms of civic activism have persisted and remained powerful, other means have started to appear gradually. These new forms have exploited the space and freedom furnished by the democratic transition, as well as the weakness of political parties and the dwindling role of traditional civil society organizations. Yet new forms of activism have not yet meaningfully addressed the radicalization taking root in some parts of Tunisia.

At the same time, some Tunisians are fed up with the ongoing mobilization in the streets, due to its perceived side effects on the country's economy and security. Many of these citizens are therefore keen to see the settlement of past feuds and reconciliation between the torturers and victims of the Ben Ali years, as well as between crony capitalists and the state.

Yet activism remains a trigger for change; it now stands as guardian of the democratic transition, with activists pushing hard for change to still-unreformed elements of the status quo. These ongoing activities, and the debates they engender, remain the proof that Tunisia's transition continues and its democracy lives.



## TURKEY: THE STRUGGLES OF A NEW CIVIL SOCIETY

*Özge Zihnioğlu*

Turkish civil society has quietly begun to move from an era of limited engagement into a new phase, and the future direction of this change remains uncertain. This shift in Turkish civil society has two dimensions. First, there is a burgeoning group of activists—largely absent from the ranks of established nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and other traditional actors—that is gaining traction on the ground. Second, as these new activists have risen to prominence, NGOs in turn have begun to change. The evolution of Turkish politics is both driving and inhibiting these shifts.

### **A HISTORY OF LIMITED CIVIC ENGAGEMENT**

To understand Turkey's civic activism today, a helpful starting point is the country's military takeover in 1980 and the legislation that followed, which crushed Turkish civil society. The generation born during this period grew up in an environment in which civic activism was either banned or widely seen as dangerous or futile. This produced a generation of citizens with low levels of civic engagement.

This low baseline of civic spirit influenced the country's subsequent political development. Analytical and policy interest in Turkish civil society rose in the 1990s, as many new NGOs were established in the more open political landscape that slowly emerged in those years. Even

as Turkey moved back toward a more open and democratic system in the 1990s and early 2000s, apathy toward organizational life continued to be prevalent among the new young generation—that is, those born after 1990.

Even now, most young people do not participate in protests or mass movements, are not members of NGOs or other such platforms, and do not volunteer.<sup>43</sup> Participation levels are somewhat higher among high school and university graduates and young people from better socioeconomic backgrounds, but the overall level of civic participation has continued to be low. One Turkish NGO expert has indicated that around 70 percent of association members are between thirty and fifty years old.<sup>44</sup> Young people describe themselves as becoming less enthusiastic about political engagement, and only about 10 percent of them are members of or take an active role in political parties.<sup>45</sup>

## **THE GEZI PROTESTS AND EMERGING FORMS OF CIVIC ACTIVISM**

What makes these trends so interesting, but at the same time puzzling, is young people's unexpected and overwhelming presence in the Gezi protests in May and June 2013. These protests started when a group of activists staged a sit-in against the urban development plan for Gezi Park, one of the few green areas left in the heart of Istanbul. When the security forces intervened violently, the demonstration quickly expanded into a huge wave of protests that involved more than 3.5 million people in almost all of Turkey's provinces over a three-week period.<sup>46</sup>

Despite much diversity among the Gezi participants, surveys carried out during the protests point to commonalities as well. On average, protesters were twenty-eight years old, which demonstrates that young people dominated the stage.<sup>47</sup> Half were women, more than half held at least a university degree, and only a small minority were members of an NGO or political party. Protesters' trust in mainstream media was extremely low, and, at the same time, they widely used social media for communicating and organizing.

The Gezi protests indicate that young people are more politically motivated than previously appeared to be the case. Yet their activism also appears to be different than past activism. Many young people have a strong grasp of overarching political and social problems, and they also have begun to engage on specific issues. These individuals pursue more focused and concrete aims, rather than the big ideals emphasized by previous forms of activism. They commonly engage on multiple issues at the same time. They remain distant from traditional NGOs, political parties, and unions, preferring to organize through ad hoc groups with flexible structures.

Advances in information and communications technology and the widespread use of social media are also certainly important aspects of this nontraditional form of activism. Social

media serves as an engine helping ad hoc groups to communicate and mobilize more rapidly. With trust in mainstream media so low, young people view social media as one of the few reliable sources of information.

After the Gezi protests, young people formed and participated in local forums and public assemblies. They established these forums toward the end of the protests to discuss how to proceed. They aimed to create an inclusive and participatory structure for decision making. Scattered around the city, these forums continued to convene even after the protests died down.

While some forum participants pushed for broad political engagement in the March 2014 local elections, most preferred to focus on community-level issues. Their subsequent activities ranged from a fight against urban renewal plans to participation in Gezi's municipal assembly meetings. Although the number of participants eventually shrank, cooperation with local NGOs and other platforms gave them a wider reach. With their horizontal, egalitarian organizational models, these forums attempted to generate small-scale consultative public spheres and make citizen participation possible—especially for young people feeling excluded from formal structures. The hierarchical and bureaucratized structures of traditional civic organizations are no longer attractive models for young Turkish activists.<sup>48</sup>

In this way, the Gezi protests have awoken a new capacity for civic activism in Turkey. The protests gave the current generation of young people a greater awareness of themselves as potential agents of change. Young people have organized other protests since the Gezi gatherings, on issues like mining accidents, hydroelectric power plants, and election monitoring. Even though international media attention has shifted to other issues, below the surface a new generation of activists has begun to fashion its own way of civic and political engagement.

## **HOW TRADITIONAL CIVIL SOCIETY IS EVOLVING**

This flourishing of new civic actors has not completely sidelined more traditional forms of civil society. Indeed, long-standing actors like NGOs are also evolving.

For instance, Turkish NGOs are becoming more professionalized. The number of paid staff in associations rose from only around 250 in 2004 to nearly 500 in 2005 and then to over 35,000 in 2015.<sup>49</sup> Working for NGOs has become a potential career path for the younger generation. Turkey now has graduate-level training on NGO management. This professionalization may be filling a gap left by the country's very low level of volunteerism. Crucially, this means a new brand of civic activism has begun to take shape, even as old forms of activism try to consolidate their presence.

At the same time, traditional Turkish NGOs are going through a process of depoliticization. In other words, where possible, they are shifting from rights-based activities to philanthropic ones and a general focus on solidarity. They are doing this so as to keep a low profile in what has become a difficult environment for civil society organizations. This trend is observable especially among NGOs that do not claim a strong ideological identity or political affiliation—whether secularist or conservative—or an ethnic identity, like that of Kurdish groups, for instance.

## **CONCLUSION**

The broader contextual challenge for both new and old activists in Turkey is the difficult overall political environment in Turkey. The spiraling polarization of Turkish political and social life is deepening the fragmentation of civil society. The country's shrinking civic space makes it increasingly challenging for new actors to sustain their potential. Particularly in the wake of Turkey's July 2016 coup attempt, the passing and implementation of new legal rules will set the political and social conditions under which civic activism develops.

## *UKRAINE: CIVIC VOLUNTEERISM AND THE LEGACY OF EUROMAIDAN*

*Natalia Shapovalova*

Ukraine's Euromaidan revolt of 2013–2014 was more than a series of protests against authoritarian rule under the symbolic banner of European Union (EU) flags. It also was a social movement in which millions of Ukrainians, within the country and abroad, participated in various ways: by volunteering at Kyiv's central Maidan Square and other protest sites, by bringing aid to the protesters, by raising funds, and by spreading the word about the protests and their goals.

Euromaidan inaugurated a new Ukrainian political culture in which it has become fashionable to engage in civic activism and to contribute one's time, money, and ideas for public causes, particularly in response to the situation in eastern Ukraine. In some cases, Ukrainian activists have also succeeded in pushing forward reform efforts. Significantly, some new types of activism have begun to filter into mainstream politics. Despite these signs of progress, however, the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine has revealed some troubling aspects of Ukrainian civil society—and also of the government's attitude toward new civic activism—that have not yet been addressed.

### **VOLUNTEERISM AND CHARITABLE GIVING IN UKRAINE**

Volunteerism has become the new watchword in Ukraine's political lexicon and the embodiment of a new form of civic activism. Volunteer groups have emerged to further the causes

that became central during Euromaidan, such as protecting human dignity, Ukraine's national revival, and the country's pro-European choice, but they also have sought to defend Ukraine's statehood and independence against external threat. According to a 2014 poll, 20 percent of Ukrainians took part in Euromaidan: 11 percent participated in the protests in Kyiv and other municipalities, and 9 percent helped the protesters with money, food, and other goods.<sup>50</sup> Unlike traditional civil society organizations—like nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), trade unions, and religious communities—volunteer groups are seen not as professional outfits motivated by self-interest but as entities that passionately support others. In fact, a 2016 survey shows that volunteers are the most trusted societal institution in Ukraine.<sup>51</sup>

As Ukrainian civic activism has grown, more citizens are financially supporting a range of causes. A 2015 survey found that the percentage of Ukrainians who make charitable donations has nearly doubled since Euromaidan, increasing from 21 percent in 2012 to 41 percent in 2015.<sup>52</sup> Citizens have mobilized in response to Russia's intervention in Crimea and armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, and they have filled in for the state in areas in which it has appeared too weak to cope—such as maintaining security, managing displaced people, and providing social services to those who have suffered.

The army tops the list of recipients of Ukrainian donations—65 percent of donors dedicated their money to this cause in 2015.<sup>53</sup> Giving also aims to support people who are sick or have disabilities (21 percent), those who find themselves in difficult living conditions (18 percent), and displaced persons and orphans (11 percent each). In western Ukraine, 89 percent of donors provide support for the army. Residents of Donbas and other eastern regions give more to support people in difficult circumstances and to the displaced.

Ukrainians are investing more time in activism as well. Although the total number of Ukrainians who volunteer has increased very modestly—from 10 percent in 2012 to 13 percent in 2015—volunteers are giving more time to civic causes and activism than before.<sup>54</sup> In 2012, only 6 percent of volunteers dedicated several hours per week to civic activism, while by 2015, this share had grown to 23 percent.

Ukrainians also have made significant contributions to the country's security. This civil society support for Ukraine's security and defense has been a direct reaction to the 2014 crisis, when the country's government appeared to be unprepared to deal with the Russian occupation and the ensuing armed conflict. Many Ukrainians have volunteered to defend the country on the front line, and many others have supported them behind the scenes by providing food, uniforms, and military equipment. Although the Ministry of Defense made efforts to raise individual donations, Ukrainians increasingly have entrusted their money to volunteer groups such as Wings Phoenix, Come Back Alive, and Army SOS, to name just a few that directly support military units and service personnel. As of January 2015, Wings Phoenix alone had raised up to 60 million hryvnia, or approximately \$2.2 million.<sup>55</sup>

Over time, volunteer groups have become more professional and developed different specializations. Some of them work on complex technical, logistical, and supply solutions for Ukrainian defense battalions, and others provide legal, medical, and psychological support to former combatants. They have also contributed to the reform of Ukraine's defense sector. The founder of Wings Phoenix has become an adviser to the president and the defense minister, and many other volunteers have landed in the Ministry of Defense to work on procurement reform.<sup>56</sup>

In light of the crises in Crimea and eastern Ukraine, volunteer groups also have emerged to support the population fleeing from the armed conflict and political persecution, as well as those who have stayed behind under the duress of occupation and war. Groups, such as Crimea SOS, Donbas SOS, East SOS, Station Kharkiv, and many others, have provided emergency response and humanitarian support to the displaced. Three years later, most of these early solidarity groups have become professional NGOs and enjoy the support of international donors and humanitarian actors. In addition, these groups have expanded their focus from providing information, offering humanitarian aid, and assisting with evacuations to include a wider range of services, including legal advice, psychological support, and policy advocacy on behalf of displaced groups. They attempt to shape Ukraine's policies toward internally displaced people and conflict-affected populations.

## **CIVIC ACTIVISM AND REFORM EFFORTS**

Aside from activities related to Ukraine's security, citizens also have pushed for political and social reforms. In areas such as defense, governance, and education, emerging volunteers and civic activists have become government officials to advance state reforms from within. Political parties have attempted to co-opt civil society leaders to win more votes. A civic activist, a member of a volunteer battalion, and a journalist became must-haves on each party list in the 2014 parliamentary elections.

This new civic activism is also closer to the grassroots level. Many volunteer groups and civic movements have mushroomed in smaller towns and villages, where citizens mobilize to monitor local authorities, engage in social entrepreneurship, and develop community spaces. According to one estimate, about 10 to 15 percent of volunteers ran as candidates in 2015 municipal elections.<sup>57</sup>

Several civic initiatives born out of the Euromaidan protests have successfully pioneered reforms in Ukraine. For instance, the Reanimation Package of Reforms (RPR) has become the largest civil society coalition in Ukraine, after starting as an initiative of Euromaidan activists preparing for the post-transition period.<sup>58</sup> Its Kyiv-based activists, journalists, and experts toured around Ukraine to involve as many local civil society movements as possible. As a result, around 500 activists have joined the network of RPR supporters.<sup>59</sup>

Divided into various working groups, the RPR has developed legislation and has advocated for the parliament to adopt it, in many cases achieving success (especially in efforts related to decentralization, justice reform, public transparency, anticorruption, e-commerce, and public broadcasting). During Ukraine's 2014 parliamentary elections, a number of RPR civil society activists ran for seats in the country's parliament and some of them were elected. The RPR also has worked with major political parties to support reforms since 2014.

The Auto-Maidan movement represents another successful transformation from a protest movement to a reform advocacy group. Auto-Maidan was dubbed the infantry of Euromaidan. When then Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovich and his ministers hid from the people's civic rage in their mansions outside the capital, car owners among the Euromaidan protesters moved the demonstration there. The biggest rally on wheels took place on December 29, 2013, when a huge fleet of cars drove to Yanukovich's residence outside Kyiv.<sup>60</sup>

After Euromaidan, the movement turned into a civil society organization with members from all over Ukraine; it focuses on police reform and the fight against corruption. In 2016, Auto-Maidan activists started a new initiative called PROSUD to support judiciary reform.<sup>61</sup> PROSUD checks the income and asset declarations of judges against their property and lifestyles. In a way, the civil society group aims to help state officials from the newly created anticorruption institutions monitor the integrity of judges all over Ukraine.

Ukraine's public e-procurement system, meanwhile, started as an idea advanced by anticorruption activists who met in Kyiv during Euromaidan.<sup>62</sup> They volunteered to develop a pilot system that was launched in early 2015 with the help of commercial platforms. Initially hosted by Transparency International Ukraine, the system has been transferred to the state, and in 2016, it became mandatory for all public entities procuring goods or services.<sup>63</sup>

## **NEW FORMS OF SUPPORT AND OUTREACH**

Ukraine's new form of civic activism is striking in its sources of support and its tactics for reaching out to society. Unlike traditional NGOs that depend on foreign funding or support from oligarchs or private donors, new movements engage in crowdfunding and use social media, reaching out to thousands of Ukrainians and encouraging them to participate by giving. In this way, such volunteer groups help to build trust among total strangers who share a common interest in promoting a public cause, whether it be support for the army or vulnerable populations.

Volunteering has become an integral part of good citizenship in Ukraine. New civic groups are now a powerful means of motivating citizens to give their time and get more involved in local community matters. These initiatives and their leaders establish high moral standards for political elites and citizens by taking personal responsibility for advancing change and working for the public good.

The division between old and new organizations and practices is blurred, though. Many volunteers come from established NGOs or religious communities and vice versa; by the same token, in the three years since Euromaidan, many volunteer initiatives have become increasingly professionalized and NGO-like. In some cases, long-standing NGOs and new civic movements are cooperating with each other.

## LINGERING CHALLENGES FOR UKRAINIAN ACTIVISM

Ukraine's civil society is stronger and more vibrant than ever, but there are also reasons to be concerned. Since Euromaidan and the start of the armed conflict in eastern Ukraine, civil society in the country has become increasingly polarized and radicalized. The deaths resulting from May 2014 protests in Odessa and August 2015 demonstrations in Kyiv are tragic instances of such polarization and radicalization.<sup>64</sup> While many of civil society's efforts are directed at fighting the war, few promote peace. Unlike the volunteer groups supporting the Ukrainian army, civic initiatives that aim at building dialogue, nonviolent conflict resolution, and reconciliation remain largely invisible and marginalized.<sup>65</sup>

The space for civic activism has become more uneven in some parts of Ukraine. In Ukrainian territories controlled by Russian or pro-Russian de facto authorities (such as Crimea and parts of Donetsk and Luhansk), freedoms of conscience, expression, assembly, and association are significantly restricted, and only NGOs and movements loyal to or established by the de facto authorities are allowed. Dissenting voices are also hindered through censorship and self-censorship in the rest of Ukraine, especially amid the information war with Russia and given the media influence of oligarchs.<sup>66</sup>

## CONCLUSION

In sum, during and since the Euromaidan revolt, new types of civic activism have taken root in Ukraine. This activism has helped retain the momentum behind democratic reforms and in many cases has interacted positively with the formal political sphere. It has also helped cement a sense of national solidarity, as Ukraine engages in a conflict fanned by an external power. Yet the impact of ongoing conflict on civic activism in Ukraine has had both positive and negative effects—and the still-unpredictable nature of events in Donbas will strongly condition the future of Ukraine's civil society.





## CONCLUSION

*Richard Youngs*

Clearly, civil society in the developing and post-Communist worlds is going through a period of great change and turbulence. These changes are far from finished, and further reshaping can be expected in the years ahead. The eight snapshots of national civil society compiled here seek to uncover how civic activism is and is not changing, where new civic activism has gained traction and where it has struggled to establish firm roots, how governments have responded to the emergence of new forms of civic activism, and what all this means for the future.

All told, two types of analysis have dominated work on new forms of global civil society. At a macro level, there is a great deal of bird's-eye examination of very general trends. In micro-level terms, many studies have focused on individual countries' new social movements. This report attempts to bridge these two levels, by offering detailed grassroots summaries of activism, while at the same time relating these local perspectives to crosscutting themes that are crucial to understanding global civil society's general trajectory. In this vein, five concluding observations can be extracted from the preceding country mappings.

**1. First, civil society around the world exhibits a mix of common trends and country-specific changes.** In recent years, new actors have emerged with common traits across the featured eight countries. In each case, civic activism has become more sporadic, footloose, tactically innovative, daring, and intent on carving out local autonomy and ownership, while new forms of civil society also are becoming less dependent on permanent membership structures

and less exclusively channeled through traditional nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and similar groups. Social movements and individual campaigners are using more creative tactics based on imagery and symbolism. And in all cases, civic activism is adapting to evade governmental controls, as regimes—both democratic and authoritarian—respond nervously and defensively to the new type of contentious politics.

Some specific examples of locally oriented, fluid activism are worth highlighting. Thailand has seen a dramatic turn toward mass mobilization through new large-scale campaigns and protests, quite different from the country's rather formal NGO sector. In Brazil, local collectives are featuring more prominently within the country's civil society. Similar forms of livelihood-related self-organization now dominate civic activism in India. Large-scale protests in Turkey, meanwhile, have given birth to a range of less-noticed community assemblies and forums.

There are several other examples as well. Egypt's innovative civil society triggered revolution but is now being persecuted under the country's new authoritarianism and struggling to survive. More broadly, volunteerism is becoming the new civic banner in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) against oppression and international apathy to the region's plight. In Tunisia, a revolutionary uprising has given birth to scores of small, local movements now highly active in campaigns and organizations very different from those before 2011. Like in these other countries, Kenyan individual campaigners and local groups focused on livelihood issues are displacing old NGO elites. In Ukraine, geopolitical imperatives have molded a new spirit of civic organization, while social movements attempt to continue the style of activism that propelled the 2013–2014 Euromaidan uprising.

While these commonalities are striking, the exact form of new civic activism reflects national specificities and political contexts. This new activism has often become part of very specific national political confrontations, rather than a phenomenon with its own pristine, intrinsic identity separate from such particularities. Thailand's new activism, for instance, is inextricably entwined with the country's unique divide between red shirts and yellow shirts. In Ukraine, activism is part of a visceral struggle for national autonomy and identity. Meanwhile, Egyptian, Tunisian, and Turkish activism is caught up in and reflects these countries' respective battles between Islamists and secularists.

It is significant that similarities appear across countries with quite different regime types and political trajectories. But at the same time, a full picture of this activism cannot be painted without assessing how each country is the product and reflection of nationally rooted struggles. While literature on this topic contains much generic analysis of new social movements and actors, it is only by comparing the complementary assessments offered here that granular nuances between countries can be identified. While globally generalizable contours of a new civil society are apparent, new activism is at the same time conditioned by more nationally specific patterns than old activism.

**2. Old and new forms of activism coexist.** Analyses about the changing face of civic movements often portray new forms of mobilization as assertively sidelining a discredited arena of traditional activism. The reality appears to be somewhat less clear-cut. New activism has not entirely eclipsed old activism. Nor is new activism quite the kind of purely spontaneous, organization-free phenomenon of popular legend.

Rather, it shares some features with more traditional forms of activism and does not always position itself in an entirely antagonistic relationship with the latter. While emerging activism is certainly less institutionally rooted than older forms that long depended upon large, membership-based and permanently structured organizations, new activism itself often latches onto organizational structures and evolves over time as it seeks to amplify its reach—or, more defensively, simply to maintain its existence. Kenya, Tunisia, Turkey, and Ukraine all provide examples of old and new activism interacting and influencing each other. It is often more accurate to see old and new forms of activism as entwined and mutually conditioning rather than as entirely separate phenomena.

Consequently, it is not entirely accurate to say that new activism is a replacement for civil society. New activism certainly is often a rival to traditional forms of civic and political organization. In all eight of the examined countries, new activists judge themselves to be countering elitist NGOs, often just as much as they target their respective governments. This is especially the case in India and perhaps also in Egypt, where exasperation with many large, formal NGOs has been high.

However, sometimes new forms of activism either harness or are harnessed by these more traditional forms of civic and political organizations. It is perhaps an exaggeration to speak of today's civil society as if it were a completely new, more legitimate creation, and it is more accurate to say that it *supplements* traditional forms of activism in different ways across contrasting national contexts. In short, diverse forms of hybrid civic activism are taking root across the world.

**3. Civil society encompasses both political and practical aims.** New civic activism is simultaneously more contentious and more pragmatic. It is both less accommodating of the status quo and more intent in practice on carving out islands of tangible progress and reform. It is driven both by citizens' increasingly profound frustration with existing political systems and by communities' desire to find ways of circumventing the constraints of these systems, while these obstacles cannot be immediately removed. Across different countries, there is a curious mix of more-politicized populations on the one hand, and forms of civic activism, on the other hand, that are focusing on more grassroots and pragmatic issues that are not about full-blown systemic change.

This apparently paradoxical combination of the highly political and the ostensibly apolitical is likely to be a powerful driving force in the future. In India, for example, new movements consciously adopt approaches that are not traditionally political, but new activists are also more convinced than are classic NGOs that change requires engagement from within the political sphere. In Kenya, Thailand, and Turkey, there is increasing resistance to cooperating with political regimes, even as civil society in these countries makes retrenchments to focus on select areas of more achievable reform. This apparent tension within the new activism will play out in unpredictable and diverse ways. Questions arise across the case studies about the sustainability of a form of activism that is driven by greater antagonism against regimes but that tactically opts for more prosaic campaigns and community-level activity.

**4. Emerging forms of civil society include both liberal and nonliberal movements.** Not all new civic activism is liberal, progressive, or benign in terms of its implications for the quality of democracy. Some new activism is led by leftist radicals, some by conservatives. A key feature of new forms of activism is that they span a wider range of ideological positions and policy concerns than has been common among the old forms of activism. Some new activism is carried forward by marginalized members of society who seek far-reaching overhauls of entire existing systems, but some activism is undertaken by well-off middle-class groups more concerned with preserving certain features of society.

In many of the countries examined, conservative, nationalistic, and even overtly antidemocratic civic activism has gained traction in recent years. In Brazil, right-wing movements are rising in prominence, and in the MENA region and Africa, civic radicalization is a growing concern. There are also misgivings about the antidemocratic impact of social movements' reliance on digital activism. This is both because online campaigning excludes large parts of the populations in places where most citizens do not have Internet access, like Brazil, Kenya, and Thailand, and also because it provides a platform for nonliberal or even antiliberal activism.<sup>67</sup>

Interestingly and crucially, new forms of civic activism are both associated with the much-commented-on surge in political populism around the world and often aim to push back *against* this populism. In essence, it is the new terrain upon which today's existential struggle between liberal and nonliberal concepts of politics is being played out. Today's global civil society is not just about the universal human rights campaigns that have long been the central pillar of traditional NGO work. Some new activism is more radically left-wing and some more radically right-wing than that which dominated international civil society in the past.

Civic activism organized around direct citizen mobilization mirrors this spirit of populism because it resonates with the idea of a direct link between people and their governments, cutting out intermediary organizations like traditional NGOs. Yet new activism has also been galvanized to resist illiberal populist projects in many countries. This new activism is neither

inherently liberal nor illiberal, but it has become so vibrant precisely because the struggle between liberal and nonliberal movements has become so intense. Pondering the future of civil society, the authors of the eight case studies in this volume highlight how fierce and uncertain this existential contest is likely to be—whether the new activism becomes handmaiden to a less liberal and more populist style of politics or part of a successful resistance against this.

**5. The effectiveness of civil society movements is closely related to weaknesses stemming from governments' repressive responses to them.** While critics fear that new activism is a harbinger of a destructively chaotic individualization of power, the bigger danger across the world is still the lack—not excess—of pluralism. New civic activism has not been strong enough to fully reverse the factors that have spurred its emergence. It has not held at bay increasingly acute authoritarianism in Egypt, Thailand, and Turkey, or growing political illiberalism in India and Kenya. Nor has it managed to dislodge vested interests blocking deeper reform in Brazil, Tunisia, and Ukraine. A key question for future research will be why the new activism appears to have been more—even if not fully—successful in Brazil, Tunisia, and Ukraine than in Egypt, Kenya, or Turkey. There may be no easy single answer to this, although one initial factor that emerges from this report's eight brief mappings is that there seems to be less polarization among civic actors in the cases of more successful impact. In the cases of Tunisia and Egypt, for example, the spirit of consensus building between civic actors in the former contrasts with the infighting and fragmentation that hampered post-2011 democratic reform in the latter.

New activism is both a cause and an effect of a harsher civic climate. An uncomfortable observation is that the new activism may have become the victim of its own significance—that is, its very success could be narrowing the future prospects of stronger impacts. In nearly all the cases, new activism today is under threat as governments judge it necessary to find ways to neutralize its potential and vibrancy. While new forms of activism have prompted governmental repression, they in turn are partly an effort to get around regime attacks on civic freedoms. To some extent, innovation in civil society is helping keep activism alive in extremely trying circumstances. However, it is too early to conclude that the adaptation of civil society has gotten sufficiently ahead of regimes' restrictive measures. In places like Brazil, India, and Kenya, the very dynamism of new activism has awoken more repressive tendencies on the part of state agencies. The new activism cannot afford to rest on its successes but must constantly innovate to survive.



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# *CARNEGIE ENDOWMENT FOR INTERNATIONAL PEACE*

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