

# STRUCTURES OF OPPORTUNITIES, EMERGING CIVIL SOCIETY AND TRANSITION: THE WORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS ORGANIZATIONS

Enrique S. Pumar

As of late there is a burgeoning discussion in the social sciences about how political mobilization and civil society affect the chances for a sustained democratic polity. One of the prevailing views in this literature asserts that the higher the rate of mobilization in civil society, the better the chances for a lasting democracy. In particular, some scholars consider volunteerism, civic engagement, and the fostering of civic values by associational networks the pillar of pluralism.<sup>1</sup> Among other things, proponents of this posture should be commended for shifting the academic debate away from state institutions towards a more sociological basis for democracy.<sup>2</sup> In addition, the idea that socialization brings about a more civic political culture conveys a noble and innovative perspective to political sociology.

However, as we apply these findings to developing societies such as Cuba, we can immediately identify several evident shortcomings of this popular approach. First, while this literature emphasizes the political consequences associated with the decline of

civic political culture, it explains little about its formation in developing nations. How do developing societies with precarious civic histories go about building one? Another puzzle is the idea that the discussion of civic society has taken place within a context of existing democracy and therefore it reveals few insights about the inner workings of associational life in nations ruled by autocratic authoritarian regimes such as Castro's.

Moreover, among democratic societies, there is an overwhelming devotion, and a genuine appreciation, for the preservation and solidification of the social fabric sustaining pluralism. A civic culture is not only cherished but also celebrated by democrats. Autocratic authoritarian regimes, on the other hand, perceive civic engagement outside their control as unruly and threatening, the main avenue for bonding among internal opposition groups. Notice, for example, Raúl Castro noteworthy report to the Politburo of the Cuban Communist Part in 1996 praising state controlled mass organizations as "the Cuban socialist

---

1. Of course this line of argument follows from Robert Putman, "Bowling Alone: America's Declining Social Capital," *Journal of Democracy*, January 1995 and from the subsequent discussion of Putman's thesis in, among other places, *The American Prospect*. See <http://www.epn.org/issues/civilsociety.html>. For Putman's response of his critics see his *Bowling Alone*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000.

2. For a state-centered literature on transition politics, see among others, Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter, *Transition from Authoritarian Rule: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986.

civil society” while condemning other non-governmental groups (NGOs).<sup>3</sup>

Analytical constructs with respect to the workings of civil society in non-democratic settings beg another question. What tools can we use to analyze the role of civil society in autocratic authoritarian regimes experiencing political tensions and social cleavages? A related but no less problematic query is the issue of how to measure the strength of civil society in developing nations. Not only is the notion of robustness analytically contentious, but as the Cuban case also reveals, any attempt to measure civic engagement invites political controversy as well. The difficulties posed by these questions are compounded by the fact that Cuban authorities mistrust and, at times, outright interfere with independent field research initiatives that attempt to investigate the nature of dissident mobilization within civil society. Researchers in this field are left to estimate the strength of unregulated participation. Often, scholars rely on second hand anecdotal sources that might compromise the reliability of their findings. As a result, we still do not have sufficient information on recruitment strategies and inter-organizational coordination among dissenting groups.

In short, the emergence and manifestation of political engagement in non-democratic regimes need further examination. Despite these hindrances, an examination of the evolution of human rights activities in Cuba sheds some light on the questions I posed earlier. Observing the role of human rights organizations as an indicator of the current state of civil soci-

ety in Cuba is worthwhile for several reasons. Human rights groups are defined as opposition hence an examination of these groups reveals the arduous road indigenous political forces face fostering democracy and the emergence of civic culture. The scarce data sources I mentioned earlier are somewhat tamed in Cuba, where human rights organizations constitute the most vocal manifestation of dissent today. These groups also independently monitor state policies in the island.<sup>4</sup> This means their activities are well documented, permitting more careful interpretation and analysis.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, the study of human rights activities in Cuba today permits us to observe the process of civic engagement as it unfolds in a non-democratic setting. Perhaps more significantly, analyzing human rights NGOs affords us the opportunity to investigate how susceptible political actors manifest leverage.

In this paper, I propose to support the assertion that although human rights organizations are fragmented and political society is still emerging in Cuba, one should not underestimate the stock of cultural capital these groups have already accumulated. Cultural capital might fuel these groups into a strategic position as coalition partner during the process of democratic transition. My points support the strength of weak ties argument.<sup>6</sup> Before I proceed to elaborate this assertion, I will situate the role of human rights organizations within the new social movement literature to demonstrate that among non-democratic regimes, civic engagement and culture erupt from the seizure of political opportunities by former regime supporters. I begin with a discussion of the emergence of

---

3. *Granma*, March 27, 1996. In fact, the 1985 constitutional decree (Number 54) which governs associations states that nongovernmental associations can be legalized as long as they are sponsored by a state institution and function as a complement to official mandates.

4. On July 21, 2001, *El Nuevo Herald* published the results of the semi annual human rights report from *La Comisión Cubana de Derechos Humanos y Reconciliación Nacional* stating that the number of political prisoners in the island was reduced by 20% during the last year, from 314 to 249 political inmates.

5. Cubanet, an internet portal, provides ample coverage of human rights organizations and their work in the island. In addition, although somewhat dated, a valuable source of information are the interviews with human rights activists captured by Christopher Kean in his book, *Diez Días en Cuba. Mensaje de la disidencia a la diáspora*, New York, Freedom House, 1992. A good anecdotal account of the emergence and socialization among dissidents is the account by formal dissident Ariel Hidalgo, *Disidencia*, Miami, Ediciones Universal, 1994.

6. The strength of weak ties argument was advocated by Mark Granovetter in his study of labor markets. See his “The Strength of Weak Ties,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 1973, 78, 1360-80.

these institutions and the organizational proliferation of these groups.

### CIVIC EMERGENCE

Civil society is the arena where citizens voluntarily assemble independently from, and at times in opposition to, the state apparatus to capitalize on their relative power to articulate demands and policy initiatives from governing institutions.<sup>7</sup> Alfred Stepan refers to civil society as the “arena where manifold social movements . . . attempt to constitute themselves in an ensemble of arrangements so that they can express themselves and advance their interests.”<sup>8</sup> Moreover, he conveniently distinguishes between two spheres of civil society, the political and the civil. Political society, the arena where human rights organizations operate, is the social space where political contestation about governance takes place. The civic differs from the political in that articulation and associational solidarity are not necessary explicitly political.<sup>9</sup>

This is a useful distinction to apply to the Cuban case and others like it. In these states, the margins of state toleration towards non-political NGOs—such as the Church-sponsored Caritas, the Asociación Nacional de Agricultores Pequeños (ANAP), or the short lived Fundación Pablo Milanés—is more lax than with respect to the political work spearheaded by dissident groups. The two spheres also experience different dynamics. It should be mentioned also that although the political and the civil spheres coexisted along each other side, there is little evidence of concertation among groups across either realm.

From the emergence of human right activities in 1976, one of the most effective strategies against them by the Cuban state has been to criminalize organized political expression. Shortly after Marta Frayde and Ricardo Bofill founded the Comité Cubano Pro-Derechos Humanos (CCPDH), a year af-

ter the Helsinki Accords were ratified, Frayde was detained, accused of espionage, and sentenced to 29 years in prison.<sup>10</sup> For the next decade, Bofill and a handful of other activists were also persecuted and frequently jailed. Unable to find an independent voice inside the island, these activists began a public discussion of the human rights situation in Cuba through Radio Martí. The first such program aired in 1988. This event marked the beginning of recurrent participation by activists in programs sponsored by the station and a strategic shift to diffuse their message in the island.

During these formative years, several important events inside and outside the island promoted the rise of organizations and voices favoring human rights. In Cuba, the Mariel crisis revealed the deep-seated discontent among sectors of society that presumably had benefited the most from revolutionary policies, such as the youth and professionals. More importantly, two vivid political developments exposed further contradictions within the revolution. First, after the regime had set in motion a new constitutional framework to institutionalize the revolution during the 1970s, it was still evident that effective political power remained under the tight control of a power elite. New ruling institutions had no independent political authority. The new constitution also provided the legal framework dissidents employed to test the limits of the regime toleration.

Not less telling was the second contradiction experienced by the regime during the late 1980s. While other bedfellows in the Socialist camp were experimenting with reforms and a relative *apertura*, the Cuban political elite dogmatically reverted back to Socialist orthodoxy. This rigid ideological position not only reaffirmed the revolutionary skepticism among intellectuals and others growing professional classes, but more significantly it eroded one of the

---

7. I first elaborated this definition of civil society in my paper “The Internal Opposition: An Assessment,” *Cuba in Transition—Volume 9*, Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 1999.

8. Alfred Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988, pp. 3-4.

9. Alfred Stepan, “Democratic Opposition and Democratization Theory,” *Government and Opposition*, 32, 4, 1997, p. 663.

10. Adolfo Rivero Caro, *Antecedentes del Movimiento de Derechos Humanos*, <http://www.sigloxxi.org/anexos-libro/anex-00 .htm>.

central claims the revolutionary elite had articulated to sustain itself in power. The revolution was no longer the vanguard of change and instead was viewed as an impediment to further revolution.<sup>11</sup> It is no coincidence that from this point forward, various Cuban leaders publicly argued that one of the goals of the revolution was to safeguard the revolution.

Changes in the international scene also fostered the promotion of human rights to some extent. Starting with the Carter administration, human rights became one of the cornerstones of American foreign policy. This trend was reinforced by President Reagan's vigorous manipulation of human rights as a tool to advocate democratization throughout the developing world. In addition, human rights and governance were also incorporated into social development policies. But, it could be argued that other external events, such as the breakdown of the Soviet Bloc, might have alerted Cuban officials to the potential political ramifications of unleashed indigenous civic mobilization.

Another potential liability emerging civil groups had to endure was their established contacts with supporters from abroad, particularly in the Cuban immigrants residing in the United States. Long regarded by the regime as intransigent foes, the Cuban community abroad overwhelmingly embraced the emergence of civic organizations providing material as well as ideological support.<sup>12</sup> They provided much needed resources and avenues to diffuse the message of dissent. But the aid came at the expense of having to reassert an independent political identity, not always well understood at times by allies abroad.<sup>13</sup> The

dissenters' public position against the U. S. embargo and in support of dialogue with the regime—in an attempt to jump start a political transition—have caused hesitation among Cuban exiles while not appeasing the regime's fears.

Human rights NGOs should be credited with reviving the art of peaceful political dissent through their adoption of a more radical non-violent posture than any previous opposition movements. While the growing opposition during the early years of the revolution engaged in confrontational protests and armed violence, the latest forms of dissent have attempted to frame their activities within the rule of law. Instead of proposing to reverse the revolution, the goal is to reform it and humanize it. In a document describing the objectives behind the formation of the Partido Pro Derechos Humanos de Cuba (PPDHC), Samuel Martínez and Ricardo Bofill describe this radical position well:

... hemos llegado a la conclusión de que además de ejercer el papel de observadores que vigilan, denuncian y critican la situación de los Derechos Humanos en Cuba, ha llegado la hora de también desempeñar el rol de los que moldean las leyes, las proponen al Parlamento y batallan porque las mismas sean aprobadas.<sup>14</sup>

This statement illustrates the latter point well; the party's goal was not only to monitor human rights abuses in the island but also to champion these principles through the legislative process. This implies a certain willingness to work within the revolutionary constitutional framework. It also tests the extent of the regime institutionalization and inclusiveness. Finally, the statement goes a long way to sustain the non-

---

11. This change of perception was captured well in the popular, often symbolic idiom where Fidel ceased to be called "el caballo" or the horse, and instead was referred to as "el Ayatola." During my visit to the island when I asked why he was called Ayatola, I was told that it was because he stubbornly opposed any reforms.

12. In a public opinion poll conducted among 1,200 randomly selected Cuban-American in South Florida by the Institute for Public Opinion Research (IPOR) of Florida International University in 1997, 92% of respondents strongly favored supporting the work of human rights groups in the island. See FIU 1997 Cuban Poll, <http://www.fiu.edu/orgs/ipor/cubapoll/report.html>.

13. In a 1996 report to the Politburo, Raúl Castro commented with respect to the autonomous civic organizations "... pecaríamos de tontos si desconocieramos la manipulación que se hace a través de otras supuestas ONGs por quienes tienen como único propósito esclavizar de nuevo a nuestro país y convertirlo en un Puerto Rico todavía más dependiente. Y ellas buscan y rebuscan contrapartidas dentro de Cuba para practicar la injerencia de nuestros asuntos internos." *Gamma*, March 27, 1996, p. 7.

14. Samuel Martínez Lara and Ricardo Bofill, *Fundación del Partido Pro Derechos Humanos*, <http://www.sigloxxi.org/anexos-libro/anex-09.html>

violent strategy endorsed by this most recent wave of Cuban dissidents.

The emergence of civil life with regards to the issue of human rights defies some of the findings of the civic engagement literature. Cuban human rights groups did not capitalize on opportunities created by splits within the political elite since elite squabbles are always kept away from the public eye in Cuba. Nor did the series of events leading to the emergence of civic life result from a weakening of state institutions or the auspices of a powerful allied like the Catholic Church, as was the case in Poland.

The available evidence during the period of emergence suggests that the historical conjunction leading to civic activism in Cuba was the result of two trends. First, the convergence of several public intellectuals, many former supporters of the regime, around a single issue, and second, the resurgence of human rights activities throughout international society after Helsinki, the Sajarov case, and the widespread popularity of human rights activities and transnational organizations. Public intellectuals who formed the nucleus of the human rights movement were motivated by a variety of grievances against the Castro regime. Some, like Alvaro de Insua, a former academic, were former political prisoners; Mayra Frayde, Gustavo Arcos, and others had left the public service; and Elisardo Sánchez and Ariel Hidalgo were former university professors. Most of these leaders broke with the regime after the *microfacción* crisis of 1968. Moreover, all were further baffled by the further Sovietization of the revolution after 1968 and the repression that ensued thereafter.

#### DIFFUSION OF ASSOCIATIONAL LIFE

During the late 1980s, the human rights movement experienced several major transformations, marking the culmination of a process of maturity and boldness. Perhaps the critical turning point took place in June 1988 when the PPDHC was founded.<sup>15</sup> After

this event, vigilance on behalf of the defense of human rights took a political overtone after activists decided that monitoring activities could not stand alone. Although party activities were officially sanctioned and its leader exiled, the formation of an alternative political organization had a contagious effect and eventually led other groups to diversify their political repertoire and meshed human rights with politics.

As a result, another trend during this recent phase was the proliferation of groups covering all aspects of the human right regime. Whereas early groups focused almost exclusively on political rights, since 1988 economic, labor, social, religious, cultural and intellectual rights, among others, also have been advocated. Civil society today encompasses 21 independent news bureaus, several professional and cultural societies advocating cultural diversity and freedom, 48 independent libraries located throughout the island, and some other 360 organizations. In addition, a dozen or so sectoral independent labor unions have been created with links to international labor movements in the United States and Europe.<sup>16</sup>

Besides the proliferation of groups, starting in the 1990s, there were also many signs of increased coordination and *concertación* among civil groups. Witness, for instance, the case of *Concilio Cubano*, a coalition of about 135 groups. Founded in 1995, *Concilio* worked to coordinate policy among its members and called for a national congress to carve an opening for opposition groups. However, almost a year after its organization, the umbrella group was crushed by the regime. *La patria es de todos* also addresses the relation among many of diverse human rights. This document resulted from the inner workings of several groups under the ad hoc umbrella organization *Grupo de Trabajo de la Disidencia Interna* whose leaders were also former regime supporters. Documents like *La patria es de todos* called on the government to end its arbitrary repression and to end

---

15. See among others, Adolfo Rivero Caro, *Antecedentes del Movimiento de Derechos Humanos*, <http://www.sigloxxi.org/anexos-libro/anex-00> and Juan Carlos Espinosa, "Civil Society in Cuba: The Logic of Emergence in Comparative Perspective," *Cuba in Transition—Volume 9*, Washington: Association for the Study of the Cuban Economy, 1999.

16. <http://www.cubanet.org>

its corruption. It suggests that the future of the island is tied to the success of national reconciliation.

A number of internal and external structural opportunities also account for the proliferation of dissident groups. Among the former, as Doug McAdam and others have demonstrated, activism often reproduces other protest opportunities.<sup>17</sup> In the case of the Cuban human rights movement, two factors seem to have contributed to further opportunities for dissent. The first was the realization that human rights encompass many different issues that a single group with limited resources cannot tackle alone. The second was perhaps the fear that once a single populous organization was formed, it would be perceived as more of a threat to the regime and therefore it would be eliminated soon. Smaller groups, on the other hand, may appear powerless, out of contention, while working on the margins and an easier target of state control. The one predictable reaction by the Cuban government has always been its disposition to crush any contending opponent. This paradox might additionally explain why organized dissent remains fragmented in Cuba.

Among external events, the destabilizing social effects of Cuba's economic troubles during the Special Period can not be overlooked. The economic changes are too numerous to discuss here. However, it is important to consider some of their socio-political effects. For one, widespread deprivation, status inconsistency, and inequality seems to have fostered enough popular discontent to multiply the number of people willing to risk their meager living conditions to join the dissent movement. Since the 1990s, a popular culture of opposition became more emboldened. In search for solutions to the economic crisis, the regime experimented with policies that appear ambivalent to

the state-run Socialist ideology, further espousing its legitimacy crisis. With the influx of more tourists and exile visits, communication and coordination between human rights groups and supporters from abroad also multiplied.

### THE RELATIVE STRENGTH (AND WEAKNESS) OF DISSENT

Thus far my argument has centered on discussing the emergence and diffusion of human rights groups within the civil society sector in Cuba. In this section of the paper, I examine several conditions that affect the relative power of this movement. The purpose for pursuing this line of research is to argue my conclusion that although civic engagement remains embryonic, one should not dismiss its chances to influence the process of political transition all together.

By definition, autocratic-authoritarian regimes stifle organized political dissent because by their very nature there is no distinct identity between governing institutions, regime, political party, and the personality of the revolutionary leader. In addition, the experience of insurrection, fomented by an unrelenting cult of personality, provides the leader with enough leverage to control factions within the ruling coalition and to perpetuate his rule. Finally, autocratic-authoritarian regimes possess a tight grip over the means of coercion.<sup>18</sup>

By the same token, it would be a major blunder to attribute the failures and limitations of civic society squarely on overwhelming state powers alone. In other comparable pre-transition situations, civic associations remained strong even before the erosion of state power. Some of the reasons for the marginal existence of civic organizations in Cuba relate to the structure of opportunity these groups have encountered since their emergence.<sup>19</sup> Opportunity structures

---

17. Doug McAdam, "Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency," *American Sociological Review*, 48, (1983), 735-54.

18. Human Rights Watch in its 1999 annual report on Cuba claimed: "Over the past forty years, Cuba has developed a highly effective machinery of repression. The denial of basic civil and political rights is written into Cuban law. In the name of legality, armed security forces, aided by state-controlled mass organizations, silence dissent with heavy prison terms, threats of prosecution, harassment, or exile. Cuba uses tools to restrict severely the exercise of fundamental human rights of expression, association, and assembly" (p. 1). <http://www.hrw.org/reports/1999/cuba>.

19. For a discussion on how the structure of opportunity shapes the movement's strategy, see Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and Mayer N. Zald, eds., *Opportunities, Mobilizing Structures, and Framing*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

refer to changes in the socio-political climate affecting social groups' capacity to organize. In the case of Cuba, one of the most obvious opportunity structures that weighs against the evolution of civil engagement is the inadequate pool of resources possessed by human rights groups. Scarce resources motivate these groups to seek support from abroad, thus playing into the regime's argument that they would be paralyzed without foreign backing. A related limitation is the increasing number of groups regularly competing for attention and resource allocation from potential allies. This intense resource competition can augment inter-organizational tensions and cleavages.

Similar ideological outlook might additionally contribute to tenuous organizational structures. The organizational weakness was evident when I applied three simple criteria from the organizational behavioral literature to the list of 360 civic organizations I mentioned earlier: only 89 published (1) lists of board members; (2) addresses or the names of contact persons; and (3) mission statements. Some will argue that the results of this very unscientific test may have to do with chance alone, but there is also the possibility that the prolific pattern of organizations can be explained by the desire to secure competing resources and contacts from abroad. The organizational pitfall reinforces the ephemeral perception and disregard these groups enjoy in some quarters. Lastly, an unintended liability of fragmented mobilization is that it promotes the image of toleration the government advocates abroad.

Still, the emerging civic organizational movement should not be easily dismissed. Besides the fact that it is hard not to sympathize with their endurance, it is evident they have acquired sufficient cultural power to guarantee them a place during a forthcoming political transition.

The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu first developed the concept of cultural capital, which is useful

here.<sup>20</sup> According to Bourdieu, cultural capital derives primarily from accumulated knowledge and experience, from objectified cultural resources, and from an institutionalized milieu of status allocation.<sup>21</sup> It could be argued that Cuban human rights groups have acquired the first by virtue of being the only existing internal dissidence. As I argued earlier, objectified cultural resources remain tenuous. However, the better-known groups within the human rights movement exhibit institutionalized status by virtue of their constant and impartial work on behalf of these principles. The question that remains to be answered is how to materialize cultural capital into practical political currency.

## HUMAN RIGHTS AND POLITICAL TRANSITION

Cultural capital can be a facilitating factor for human rights groups to seize an opportunity and play a key role during the event of a political transition after the downfall of the Castro regime. Two most viable scenarios appear in the political horizon of the island. The first, would be marked by a split between reformers and hardliners within the ruling elite as a result of a lack of compromise over the rules of the game and in the absence of a hegemonic, charismatic leader. I call this scenario "intra-elite demise." A second possibility might involve the formation of a caretaker civilian government with the backing of, or dominated by, the military after Castro's disappearance. I refer to this second scenario as "the bureaucratic-authoritarian option."

Whichever of these or any other option materializes, it is obvious that the winning coalition needs an ideology to legitimize its authority and to enlist support from abroad before taking the reigns of a new government. Human rights groups can provide the legitimizing currency to build such support at a minimum cost since their organizational weakness does not appear to pose a threat. The cultural stock accu-

---

20. Pierre Bourdieu, "The forms of capital," in *Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education*, ed. by J. G. Richardson, 241-58, New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

21. See also David Swartz, *Culture and Power*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997, especially pp. 75-77.

mulated by dissenting organizations essentially consists of:

- an ideology and a program for national reconciliation,
- principles endorsing freedom and respect for human dignity,
- an organizational identity that is not tainted by the corruption of the pre- and post-revolutionary epoch,
- a peaceful power transition and negotiated solutions to political crises,
- political pluralism, and
- well cultivated links to international actors and Cubans in exile.

### CONCLUSION: CUBAN HUMAN RIGHTS GROUPS AS A NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENT

According to Sidney Tarrow, social movements are characterized by four empirical properties: collective challenge, common purpose, solidarity and sustained interaction.<sup>22</sup> Collective challenges are the actions that are most common to social movements such as public manifestations against elites or coordinated personal resistance. Common purposes are the common claims against opponents or authorities that band people together. Solidarity amounts to translating the recognition of common interests into collective action. Sustained collective actions are manifestations of political organization over time.

Each of these characteristics is present to some degree among Cuban human rights groups in civil society. As these groups banded together against the regime after their initial emergence, they agreed on a common set of principles that are embodied in their political programs and ideology. These principles call

for a peaceful transition and national reconciliation emanating from the International Declaration of Human Rights. They also articulate common democratic claims against the Socialist state. However, the degree of solidarity and sustained collective action remains sporadic.

In addition to the four characteristics set out by Tarrow, the Cuban case underlines the pivotal role played by former regime supporters in the formation of civil engagement among autocratic-authoritarian governments when they manage to capitalize on structural opportunities. This professional class tends to enjoy more educational opportunities than the average citizen does. They also have more opportunities to learn about foreign ideological trends from travels abroad and frequent meetings with foreigners. Since they tend to be well connected, they are aware of arbitrary and capricious policy decisions. In short, disenchanted former supporters are well endowed to capitalize on political chances and create further opportunities for others.

I am not suggesting that human rights groups will become the centerpiece of a post-Castro Cuba, as some well intentioned sympathizers of these groups would like to have us believe. However, I also flatly reject the fatalistic notion about the future of civic engagement articulated by skeptics. My call is not to dismiss the power of ideology in volatile situations and to avoid deterministic estimates based on the power of numbers. While it is true that currently human rights groups remain small and fragmented, they possess a currency others might desire. As such, they could play the role of a coalition partner and seek some concessions in exchange for *legitimation*. Of course, only time will tell the feasibility of this or other scenarios.

---

22. Sidney Tarrow, *Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 3-6.