Civil Society in Peru: a Force for Democracy?

(First Draft)

James D. Rudolph
Lima, Peru
rudolphfamilia@computextos.com.pe

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I. Introduction

The importance attributed to an actively engaged civil society dates back at least to *Democracy in America*, the 1835 classic by Alexis de Tocqueville in which he pointed to the American propensity to form civic associations as a key element in their ability to make democracy work. The late 1980s witnessed an extraordinary series of events -- including the rise of Solidarity in Poland, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the overthrow of Ferdinand Marcos -- that brought civil society to the attention of the world, and particularly the United States government, as a key factor in bringing down authoritarian regimes and in consolidating democracy. The web page of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) thus justifies the agency’s growing support for activities to strengthen civil society:

“The hallmark of a free society is the ability of individuals to associate with like-minded individuals, express their views publicly, openly debate public policy, and petition their government. ‘Civil society’ is an increasingly accepted term which best describes the non-governmental, not-for-profit, independent nature of this segment of society. In countries with fragile democratic traditions, the freedoms so necessary to building and sustaining an active and independent civil society often are little understood, temporarily curtailed, or simply denied. USAID is working to strengthen commitment to an independent and politically active civil society in developing countries.”

Recent academic literature on the relation between civil society and democracy starts with Robert D. Putnam’s 1993 publication of *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy*, in which he found a clear correlation between the high level of civic engagement in northern Italy, when compared to southern Italy, and the effectiveness of local government in the two areas. Putnam’s “Bowling Alone: America’s Declining Social Capital,” published two years later, finds a correlation between the weakening of civil society in the U.S. over the past 30 years and the erosion of the effectiveness of democratic institutions. These two highly influential works validated the view that a strong civil society is a vital component of effective, democratic government, and spawned the emphasis of USAID, the World Bank and other donors on the need to incorporate civil society into the so-called “second-generation reforms” that will foster effective, democratic governance.

Subsequent literature on civil society has criticized this “civil society argument” from a variety of standpoints, including its ignoring the fact that civil society includes such non-democratic organizations as the Klu Klux Klan and the militia movement in the western United States; its role in promoting the privatization of services traditionally entrusting to the State instead of

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1 http://www.info.usaid.gov/democracy/civ.html
seeking more honest, effective democratic governments; and most of all, for the lack of a clear definition of what constitutes civil society.\(^3\)

In the case of Peru, most analysts agree on several key aspects of the role played by civil society during the ups and downs of democratic rule from the 1960s to the early 1990s. In a nutshell: civil society blossomed under the first government of Fernando Belaúnde; was repressed by the military government of Juan Velasco Alvarado, who unsuccessfully attempted to control organized civil society through the top-down structure of SINAMOS; these then-irrepressible civil society organizations were instrumental in forcing the military regime lead by Francisco Morales Bermúdez to step down in favor of a civilian, democratic government in 1980, and then were instrumental in inhibiting the second Belaúnde government from implementing a series of neo-liberal economic reforms; and finally, these same CSOs were virtually destroyed by the combination of the ferocious jealousy of Sendero Luminoso and the economic crisis of the late 1980s and early 1990s.

Likewise, it is commonly asserted that the loss of the vital political role that civil society had enjoyed during the late 1970s and early 1980s was an important facet of the weakening of democracy in Peru under the authoritarian rule of President Alberto Fujimori.\(^4\) This paper will test that affirmation, first by scrutinizing the various elements of Peruvian civil society in the development of a working definition and then, following a review of the political role of civil society over the past three decades that fleshes out their historical role presented in the previous paragraph, by examining the political role played by each of the major elements of Peruvian civil society during the 1990s. Given the belief that a vibrant civil society is vital to a healthy liberal democracy, this paper will, lastly, attempt to analyze whether Peruvian civil society is capable of functioning as a force to revitalize Peruvian democracy.

II. What is Civil Society?

As mentioned above, there is no precise definition of civil society. What civil society is and is not is the subject of a growing body of literature. Rather than participate in that debate, I would like to make use of a simple and, hopefully, relatively uncontroversial definition for the purposes of this paper: civil society is the organized, private, not-for-profit sector of society. This definition excludes all governmental organizations and all for-profit efforts by private business, including the mass media and institutions of higher learning. While political parties could also be incorporated under this definition, they will be excluded here, leaving these key political institutions to be considered elsewhere. This definition does include, however, community-based and other organizations, many of which fall outside what those who define civil society organizations (CSOs) as being strictly voluntary associations seeking public objectives.

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4 Guillermo O’Donnell points out that civil society “has to be ignored” in “delegative democracies” such as Peru. See Journal of Democracy, vol. 5, no. 1 (January 1994), pp. 60-61.
This paper will divide civil society organizations (CSOs) into two categories: traditional and non-traditional. The former consists of the Church (Roman Catholic and Evangelical Protestant), business and professional associations, and popular organizations (labor, campesino, and student) that, in the case of Peru, have traditionally been linked to political parties. The latter includes community-based CSOs (also referred to as “survival groups”), including Clubes de Madres, Comités de Vaso de Leche, community soup kitchens, neighborhood organizations, among others, and the growing numbers of civic-oriented non-governmental organizations (NGOs).

A. Traditional Civil Society Organizations

Traditional CSOs constitute, in large part, what previously was identified as “interest groups” or “pressure groups.” The largest of these is the Catholic Church, in which some 90 percent of Peru’s population traditionally claim nominal membership. The Catholic Church in Peru consists of a number of dioceses that, although ultimately under the hierarchical authority of Rome, enjoy considerable autonomy in their activities, as long as they don’t contradict papal doctrine. Evangelical Protestantism (“evangelismo”) accounts for the second largest organized religion in Peru. Although it represents less than ten percent of the number of adherents to Catholicism, its numbers have increased steadily since its much-publicized role in the election of Mr. Fujimori in 1990.

Although the private sector, per se, is considered to be outside of the realm of civil society, its representative institutions are an important component of traditional CSOs. Business organizations have undergone a transformation during the past three decades, however, and today have little resemblance to the powerful pre-Velasco business-sector institutions. Twenty-two of the most powerful business associations are today grouped together within the National Confederation of Private Enterprise Institutions (CONFIEP), which was founded in 1984 to promote private enterprise and the maintenance of unity among their representative organizations, as well as the social and economic development of Peru. Peru’s community of small and microenterprises, which together account for 98 percent of the country’s private businesses and three-fourths of its employment in urban areas, also has a number of representative institutions, although they are incipient and characterized by their institutional weakness.

In the late 1990s, there were fifteen active professional associations in Peru, representing some 190,000 professionals nationwide. The five largest of these organizations represented engineers, accountants, lawyers, nurses, and doctors. In general, these associations have been largely unsuccessful in their efforts to support the professional development and interests of their membership.

The final group I am including under traditional CSOs are so-called popular organizations, including organizations representing labor, campesinos and students. Student organizations are lumped into this group because, traditionally, they have expressed a strong element of solidarity

5 See, for example, Carlos A. Astiz, Pressure Groups and Power Elites in Peruvian Politics (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969).
with labor and campesinos and because, like labor and campesino organizations, they have
traditionally been closely linked to political parties.

Organized labor has traditionally been one of the strongest elements in civil society. Today, its
numbers have dwindled dramatically, along with its capacity to promote the interests of its
affiliates. Numerous labor confederations have virtually disappeared from view, leaving the
General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP) as the only functional confederation of labor
interests. The decline of organized labor in Peru has numerous causes, including the threat to
labor leaders caused by Sendero Luminoso; the decline of many industries traditionally
associated with organized labor due to hyperinflation, economic recession, and the structural
reforms instituted during the 1990s, especially the deregulation of the labor market. The most
powerful element within the CGTP was the Construction Workers’ Federation, which claimed
250,000 affiliates nationwide.

Campesino organizations, including the National Agrarian Confederation (CNA), the National
Agrarian Organization ONA, and the Confederation of Peruvian Campesinos (CCP), have
likewise suffered a drastic decline. The CCP continues to have the shell of the important
organization it was 20 years ago, integrating representative organizations from a wide range of
campesino interests, including federations of rural workers, campesino and native communities,
agrarian cooperatives, producers’ committees, agrarian leagues, peasant women’s organizations.
It has also incorporated new groups, including rondas campesinas, coca growers, artisans and
displaced persons. Nonetheless, the CCP and other peak organizations had lost their importance
by the late 1990s, when local and specialized organizations played a more significant role in
representing the interests of the Peruvian campesino.

Organized student involvement in the public sphere of Peruvian social and political change dates
back to the 1918 University Reform. University and youth organizations were generally tied to
the political parties, and served as the breeding grounds for future party leaders. The 1960s were
the heyday of student organizations, which subsequently underwent a series of crises that
paralleled those of the parties: first due to their inability to respond to the vertical, top-down
alternative structure imposed by the Velasco regime, then to the splintering of the ideological left
and the ultra-radical challenge of Sendero Luminoso and the MRTA, and finally to the
intervention of the Fujimori regime in numerous universities against the seven-decade-old
tradition of university autonomy. The second half of the 1990s, however, has witnessed
somewhat of a resurgence of university student organizations in response to the authoritarian
nature of the Fujimori regime.

6 From well over 1 million affiliates during the late 1970s, by the late 1990s, organized labor could claim barely 500,000
(López, La Sociedad Civil en el Peru, p. 257).
7 Sagasti, et. al., p. 68.
B. Non-Traditional Civil Society Organizations

This group includes community-based CSOs (Clubes de Madres, Comités de Vaso de Leche, community soup kitchens, neighborhood organizations, among others) and the growing numbers of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Both types of non-traditional CSOs appeared in force during the military regimes of the 1970s, although for different reasons. Community-based NGOs grew out of the economic crisis that resulted from the failure of the Velasco experiment and the austerity imposed by the Morales Bermúdez regime in conjunction with the International Monetary Fund. These “survival groups” sprung up, first in Lima and subsequently nationwide, as a practical means for the extremely poor to meet their basic needs. During the past two decades, economic crisis and the struggle for survival by a significant segment of the population have become a permanent aspect of Peruvian reality, and as a result, community-based CSOs have, likewise, grown to assume a permanent, vital role among the poorest sectors of society.

The magnitude of their growth has been impressive. By 1997, according to the National Statistical Institute (INEI), Peru had no less than 15,835 Club de Madres, benefiting 1,114,161 persons, 51,438 Comités de Vaso de Leche, with 4,450,618 beneficiaries, and 7,211 community soup kitchens (comedores populares), having 570,404 beneficiaries, just to name the three largest groups of community-based CSOs.\(^8\) These and similar “survival groups” of the poor have come to account for no less than the major element, in terms of sheer numbers, of Peruvian civil society.\(^9\)

The second grouping under the rubric of non-traditional CSOs consists of the ever-expanding number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs).\(^10\) The rapid growth of the NGO community initiated during the 1970s in opposition to the failing development policies of the military government, then continued as the recipients of funding for development projects shifted from the State to the NGO community.

NGOs such as Common Cause, the Sierra Club, etc. are often considered to be a part of civil society in the United States, but in Peru and the rest of Latin America, NGOs are commonly conceptualized as promoters of civil society rather than as integral parts of civil society. Indeed, while NGOs qualify under our definition of civil society (the “organized, private, not-for-profit sector of society”), Peruvian NGOs have traditionally been devoted to research and economic development; their primary relation to civil society has been limited to their role in leadership training. In the 1990s, however, NGOs in Latin America have begun to take more active civic

\(^8\) Cited in López, ibid., p. 263.
\(^9\) López refers to these groups as the “civil society of the poor.” Other analysts, noting their non-voluntary nature and/or to their lack of autonomy, give these “survival groups” a special place in civil society, or exclude them altogether.
\(^10\) Recent literature reflects a disagreement on the size of Peru’s NGO community, perhaps the result of many NGOs having more than one location. McNulty cites DESCO that there were 738 NGOs in Peru in 1997; Palmer cites the National Register of NGOs as listing about 1,650 NGOs licensed to operate in Peru in 1997; while López, ibid., cites Cuánto, S.A., Peru en Cifras, 1998 in counting 1,857 development NGOs (NGDOs) in the same year.
roles as watch-dogs over the public sector and in the mobilization of citizens. In Peru, a small but growing number of NGOs have begun to assume such civic roles during the past two decades, with varied measures of success.

III. Peruvian Civil Society in Historical Context

The Catholic Church has, of course, the longest history in Peru among the organizations under consideration, although its close relationship to the State limited its role as an independent actor within civil society until the 1960s. Other organizations considered herein to be CSOs were first created at the turn of the 20th century, when elite interests were effectively represented by the National Agrarian Society (SNA) and the National Industrial Society (SNI) during the so-called “Golden Age of the Aristocracy” that survived until a coup d’etat placed Augusto B. Leguía in power in 1919. The Leguía dictatorship witnessed the birth of the APRA party, which dominated Peru’s civil society organizations during the next four decades. APRA grew out of the student movement led by Víctor Raúl Haya de la Torre as the Peruvian manifestation of the university reform movement founded in Argentina in 1918. The nascent APRA party also organized many of Peru’s first labor organizations, concentrating its early efforts among the north coast sugar workers. Throughout the 1930s, APRA and the Communist Party of Peru competed for influence over the growing labor movement, but the APRA-controlled Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CTP) eventually proved dominant over the PCP-controlled General Confederation of Peruvian Workers (CGTP).

The 1960s witnessed a new stage in the growth of civil society in Peru. The Church made important strides in its consideration of the problems of the poor. Newly created political parties, particularly Acción Popular and the Christian Democrats, made similar openings toward the inclusion of the poor in the political process. APRA and PCP-controlled labor unions grew significantly, and came to include such middle-class professions as bankers and school teachers. Party-sponsored student organizations also flourished as the university population increased significantly. The first neighborhood associations of urban poor also began to emerge under the auspices of political parties or the State, the latter under President Fernando Belaúnde’s program of cooperación popular. In addition, many campesinos in the sierra carried out a process of organization and mobilization over land rights.

The 1968 coup d’etat was, in part, an attempt to stop the growth of CSOs and to replace these organizations with a participatory structure imposed and controlled from above by the State. The Velasco regime hoped that the Council of Industrial Communities (CONACI), closely linked to the Ministry of Industry and Commerce, and the National Agrarian Confederation (CNA), closely linked with the Ministry of Agriculture, would replace the traditional labor organizations and the Peruvian Campesino Confederation (CCP). These and other regime-created participatory

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11 See, for example, Katherine M. Bailey, “NGOs Take to Politics: the Role of Non-Governmental Organizations in Mexico’s Democratization Effort,” paper delivered at the 1998 meeting of the Latin American Studies Association, September 24-26, 1998.
vehicles were supervised under the larger structure of the National System of Social Mobilization (SINAMOS). The Church openly supported the regime’s reformist efforts.

The regime created numerous parallel labor organizations in an unsuccessful attempt to break the back of the growing communist labor organizations. The Confederation of the Workers of the Peruvian Revolution (CTRP) was to replace the CGTP, the Union of Educators of the Peruvian Revolution (SERP) was to replace the Maoist Single Union of Education Workers (SUTEP), etc. But these efforts only backfired. A series of unprecedented general strikes following a June 1976 package of “economic stabilization” measures that generated a steep monetary devaluation and decline in real wages was spearheaded by SUTEP and incorporated the new regime-created labor organizations. These highly political strikes were instrumental in bringing down the regime of General Francisco Morales Bermúdez and forcing the return to civilian, constitutional government in 1980.\footnote{See Nicolás Lynch, La Transición Conservadora: Movimiento Social y Democracia en el Perú, 1975-1978. (Lima: El Zorro de Abajo, 1992). In an extraordinary December 12, 1999 interview on Peruvian Channel N television, former President Morales Bermúdez stated that pressures from civil society had been instrumental in his fall from power.}

Labor continued to enjoy considerable clout under the second Belaúnde administration, when it played an instrumental role in preventing the neo-liberal economic package of Prime Minister Manuel Ulloa from being fully implemented. Together with the growing number of community-based CSOs (particularly comités de vaso de leche and community soup kitchens), labor provided important organizational support for the impressive growth of the parties of the left during the early 1980s. As the political fortunes of the non-violent left diminished during the second half of the decade, these CSOs, likewise, suffered from the threats posed by Sendero Luminoso and the growing economic crisis. Community-based CSOs played an ever more important role as the crisis deepened, but they became decentralized and detached from their political roots on the left. The escalating violence prompted the emergence of a new breed of community-based CSO, the Self-Defense Committees (or rondas campesinas), but over time, these became increasingly intertwined with Armed Forces counter-insurgency efforts.

Conservative and middle class expressions within civil society were also affected by the multiple crises of the late 1980s, but not to the extent of the popular CSOs of the political left. The evangelical church grew during the decade from 5 to 8 percent of the population and played an important role in the election of the upstart Alberto Fujimori in 1990, while the NGO community grew to fill gaps created by the crisis within the Peruvian state apparatus. The business community became more consolidated with the creation of CONFIEP in 1984, and as it was required to defend itself from the multiple threats posed during the government of Alan García. Another arena of civil society that witnessed growth during the 1980s consisted of regional organizations seeking a decentralization of governmental authority away from Lima.\footnote{López, Ciudadanos Reales e Imaginarios (Lima: Instituto de Diálogo y Propuestas, 1999), pp. 284-85.}
IV. Civil Society in the 1990s: a Force for Democracy?

A point of departure for a discussion of the role of civil society in Peru during the 1990s, then, is that traditional civil society was not at all autonomous, but rather, closely linked to the political parties. The election of Fujimori in 1990 was, in large part, a product of the decline of the political parties amidst the multiple crises of the García government. Particularly hard hit were the left and APRA, which were the institutional bases for Peru’s popular-sector CSOs that had been so politically influential between 1975 and 1985. It is impossible to argue, then, that Fujimori decimated Peruvian civil society during his presidency; a large portion of it, much of what I have designated as “traditional” civil society, had already been decimated when he came to power in 1990. Non-traditional CSOs continued to grow during the decade, and by 2000 were overwhelmingly the most important element, in terms of size, of Peruvian civil society.

A. Traditional CSOs in the 1990s

As mentioned earlier, the already weakened labor organizations were further weakened by the liberal economic policies of the Fujimori government, particularly the deregulation of the labor market. By the close of the 1990s, barely 3 percent of the Peruvian population could claim membership in organized labor. The CGTP-affiliated Federation of Construction Workers, bringing together over 40 unions and 250,000 workers, was an exception in a labor movement that was virtually immobilized throughout much of the decade. This was due, in part, to the important role played by the construction industry in the generation of employment during the decade. The construction workers also brought considerable attention to themselves via frequent street demonstrations that were commonly marked by the violent destruction of property. In addition to seeking traditional wage- and benefits-related goals, the construction workers sought to encourage national development via large construction projects and, increasingly during the latter years of the decade, they also pursued the expressly political goal of stopping what its leadership considered to be Fujimori’s methodical and illegal campaign to extend his presidency beyond 2000. Other affiliates of the 500,000-member CGTP joined them in frequent protest demonstrations, which were noisy and often violent, but only rarely did they attract more than a few hundred souls.

Campesino organizations became decentralized during the decade, being concerned with local issues geared toward survival in the market-oriented economic atmosphere of the 90s, rather than the land-related issues that sparked their earlier political role. In addition, the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s removed the State from its former roles in the commercialization of agricultural products, and thereby eliminated what had often been a source of conflict between the government and the campesino organizations.

The third “popular” element of traditional civil society that has traditionally been linked to political parties consists of university students. During the late 1980s and early 1990s, the

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14 López, La Sociedad Civil en el Perú, p. 253.
15 Sagasti, et. al., p. 68.
traditional associations of university students underwent a painful process of ultra-radicalization, led by Sendero Luminoso and the MRTA, that was followed by the intervention and military occupation of the universities in violation of the long-heralded principle of university autonomy. Similar to the CGTP, the Fujimori government’s disregard for the rule of law in its bid to extend its mandate beyond 2000 served as a catalyst to revive the political interests of Peru’s university students. The unceremonious dismissal by the Fujimori-controlled Congress in May 1997 of three members of the Court of Constitutional Guarantees ignited the creation of the Student Coordinator for Democracy and Human Rights, which immediately called for a public protest that proved to be the largest street demonstration of the decade. The Student Coordinator brought together a number of leaders from 14 universities, but proved to be unwieldy and unable to sustain its initial enthusiasm for street protest. The deathblow to the Student Coordinator was the 1998 Congressional vote that nullified a year-long campaign that had succeeded in collecting some 1.4 million signatures in favor of holding a national referendum on whether or not Fujimori could be a candidate for re-election in 2000. Another recent creation, the University Forum (university students linked to the opposition Democratic Forum), also fell into inactivity as a result of “the death of the referendum.” Fujimori’s December 1999 announcement of his candidacy sparked some of the leaders of the Student Coordinator to form a new university student group, called Regeneration, against what it considered to be Fujimori’s unconstitutional candidacy. Other student organizations, including the Alameda Collective and the Party for Social Democracy, were born during the turbulent and controversial 2000 electoral campaign. Each of these student organizations in opposition to Fujimori was independent of any political party.16

Popular Youth (Juventud Popular) is a more traditional student group, claiming 5,000 active members, that has ties to the tiny New Left political party. It’s political position calls for respect for the rule of law and a change in the neo-liberal economic policies that will generate more employment.17

The university student and labor CSOs, then, are considerably diminished from what they were in the early 1980s. They continue to have effective, if sporadic, roles in support of liberal democratic values and, specifically, against the anti-democratic characteristics of the Fujimori government.

Throughout the 1990s, the Catholic Church has consistently been the institution that public opinion pools show as receiving the highest measure of public respect. The Church had its conflicts with the Fujimori government, beginning with the open support for Mario Vargas Llosa during the 1990 presidential campaign by his cousin, Augusto Vargas Alzamora, who was Archbishop of Lima at the time, and the high level participation of figures from the Evangelical Protestants during Fujimori’s 1990 campaign and the early years of his government. The Fujimori government’s unprecedented openness to widespread and organized programs of family planning was also a cause for periodic tension with the Roman Catholic hierarchy. As the decade

17 López, La Sociedad Civil, p. 244.
wore on, nonetheless, these difficulties were largely overcome, and the naming of Juan Luis Cipriani, the conservative archbishop of Ayacucho who had played an important role during the Japanese Embassy hostage crisis and, as a result, was a close friend of the President, to be archbishop of Peru in 1999 further improved Church-State relations.

The Fujimori government’s growing disregard for the rule of law in its bid to extend its mandate beyond 2000 evoked protests from different parts of the Church hierarchy, however. This became especially pronounced when the presidential campaign was underway. One of a number of the examples of these ethical concerns was the March 2000 public expression by the President of the Peruvian Bishops’ Conference, Monseñor Luis Bambarén, that should the recent allegations of Fujimori’s Peru 2000 having falsified 1 million signatures in its registration with electoral authorities prove to be true, it would be a “serious offense against the people of Peru.”

The Evangelical (Protestant) Church, as mentioned earlier, grew significantly during the 1980s and 1990s, in part at least, to the population’s search for new means of survival in the midst of an extended, multifaceted crisis in Peruvian society. As the result of evangelical support for the Fujimori campaign, no less than 49 evangelicals were included in Fujimori’s first congressional list, and the president of the National Evangelical Council of Peru, Carlos García García, was 2nd Vice President under the first Fujimori government. This important Evangelical role in the Fujimori administration diminished after the 1992 coup d’etat, however. The Evangelical Church openly participated in campaigns that countered Fujimori policies, for example, the worldwide campaign to forgive the foreign debt. In 2000, the same National Evangelical Council of Peru that had been instrumental in his 1990 election publicly pronounced against President Fujimori’s “re-re-election” campaign.

Despite having supported Vargas Llosa in the 1990 presidential campaign, the CSOs of the business community were, during much of the “Fujimori decade,” vital supporters of a government that offered significant benefits to business, such as the end of “labor stability laws,” and most importantly, the stable “rules of the game” for business that had been sorely lacking under previous regimes. Despite the fact that a significant portion of its resources are derived from the United States government, CONFIEP publicly supported the April 5, 1992 coup. This unqualified support became tempered, however, by a number of factors during the latter half of the decade. Sinesio López saw a growing division in the business community between “winners” and “losers” under the government’s economic model, with “winners” including the banking community and the related private pension funds, the mining and fishing communities and their associated exporting interests, while the “losers” including associations of smaller industrial, construction and exporting firms lacking the resources to adapt to the new demands brought by the globalized economy. Politically motivated attacks on prominent members of the business

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20 http://www.transparencia.com.pe
22 López, ibid., pp. 189-91.
community, including Baruch Ivcher, Jaime Mur, Guido Pennano and Genaro Delgado Parker, also had a disheartening effect on the love affair between Fujimori and the business community.\textsuperscript{23}

Peru’s professional associations during the 1990s were generally too weak to successfully promote the interests of their members and with little role in political affairs. Sinesio López cites the inability of Doctors’ Association to have an impact on the government’s decision to overhaul of the social security (public health) system or on its often-controversial reproductive health policies as an example of the general weakened condition of Peru’s professional associations.\textsuperscript{24}

The 30,000-member Lima Bar Association did play a political role during the 1990s, however, especially via public expressions in opposition to the legal measures undertaken by Congress to weaken the judicial institutions of the 1993 Constitution (the Constitutional Tribunal, the Magistrates Council, the National Elections Jury), and to other legal shenanigans by the 1995-2000 Congress to pave the way for a 3\textsuperscript{rd} Fujimori candidacy in 2000. Jorge Avendaño, who was president of the Lima Bar during the early 1990s, then elected to Congress under the banner of the Unión por el Perú party, was a particularly effective critic of the legal manipulations prior to and during Fujimori’s 3\textsuperscript{rd} presidential campaign.

A growing number of non-profit press associations played an increasing role during the late 1990s, in reaction to growing threats on the freedom of the press and, with the launching of the 1990 general election campaign, in efforts to promote civic education. The Peruvian Press Council played an especially important role in acting as a watch-dog over the growing threats to freedom of the press and, in early 2000, over the conduct of the campaign for the 2000 general elections.

Regional organizations seeking a decentralization of governmental authority from Lima, which had gained increasing influence during the 1980s, were repressed during the 1990s. Fujimori’s creation of the so-called Transitory Councils for the Administration of Regions (CTARs) was disguised as a decentralization effort, but in practice, served to re-centralize authority back in Lima from the Regional authorities created under the García government. The most powerful of the regional organizations was Frente Loretano, centered in Iquitos, which was especially active in protest of boundary agreement with Ecuador, but ultimately failed in these efforts.

In general, then, traditional CSOs, were unable to exercise effective political actions in the 1990s. Those that had been closely linked to the political parties (labor unions, campesino and student organizations) remained generally weak throughout the decade, reflecting the ongoing crisis in the system of political parties. Campesino organizations eschewed their previous political concerns concerning land distribution, and instead pursued local efforts to improve their highly precarious economic situations. Labor was a shadow of its former strength, although the Construction Workers continued to be an occasionally active element, along with university student groups, in street manifestations against the Fujimori regime. Press associations and the Catholic and Evangelical Churches, likewise, became vocal in their opposition to President

\textsuperscript{23} Durand, p. 197.

\textsuperscript{24} López, \textit{ibid.}, p. 252.
Fujimori’s increasingly authoritarian demeanor toward the end of the decade. While professional associations were generally weak and ineffective, the associations of the business community that – together with the military -- had been key Fujimori allies during his first term in office, became divided during the prolonged economic recession of his second term.

B. The Growing Importance of Community-based CSOs

Community-based CSOs, together with the NGO community, constitute what is being termed “non-traditional CSOs” in this paper. If the traditional CSOs had been generally weakened, divided and/or ineffective as political actors during the 1990s, this was not the case with the non-traditional CSOs. The community-based CSOs, many of which earned the term “survival groups” due to their concentration on the provision of basic needs to the poor, grew to the point that they were the principal manifestation of civil society in Peru during the 1990s. In 1997, the three principal types of community-based CSOs (Club de Madres, Comités de Vaso de Leche, and community soup kitchens) directly benefited more than 6 million persons. Together with thousands of neighborhood and parents’ associations and community day-care centers known as “wawa wasi,” and some 500 local self-defense committees (also known as rondas campesinas), these widespread organizations of Peru’s “civil society of the poor” encompassed or benefited between 40 and 50 percent of the national population.

Peru’s burgeoning community-based CSOs fit our earlier definition of civil society as “the organized, private, not-for-profit sector of society.” There is no doubt, however, that they are conceptually distinct from traditional CSOs; some analysts argue that these organizations do not meet the criteria of a rigid definition of civil society as being “autonomous,” “voluntary” and “acting in the public (‘civic’) sphere.” Indeed, the controversy over the political role of the popular sector in Peru under Fujimori is, in part, a reflection of the disagreement over whether community-based CSOs can legitimately be incorporated under the term “civil society.” Before examining the political role of community-based CSOs in the 1990s, then, let’s briefly look at how these three criteria pertain to them.

Peru’s traditional civil society, closely linked to political parties, has rarely been truly “autonomous.” There is, likewise, little doubt that most Peru’s community-based CSOs are lacking in autonomy. Born under the auspices of the political parties of the left, NGOs and/or the Church, during the 1990s the survival groups have come increasingly to depend on State resources, particularly from the National Compensation and Social Development Fund (Foncodes), the National Nutritional Program (Pronaa) and other entities of the Ministry of the Presidency. While these survival groups were thus never fully autonomous, their growing dependence on the State has particularly salient implications for their political role. Neighborhood organizations, parents’ associations and other community-based CSOs, however, have enjoyed a much higher degree of autonomy.

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25 These are among the criteria used by Larry Diamond in Developing Democracy: Toward Consolidation (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. 221. Sagasti, et. al., ibid. (pp. 64-66) is among those who point out that Peru’s community-based organizations do not meet these criteria.
Secondly, the fact that most community-based CSOs have goals linked to the survival of their members makes it quite dubious whether or not they can be considered to be “voluntary” organizations. While good arguments can be made on both sides of the question, given that no entity has obligated Peru’s poor to organize into survival groups, we will maintain here that they should indeed be considered to be “voluntary.”

Third, we must consider whether the activities of Peru’s community-based CSOs can rightfully be considered as “actions within the public (i.e., civic) sphere,” thus placing them in the political arena, or rather, they should be considered to be confined to the private sphere. Martín Tanaka argues that the neo-liberal reforms of the 1990s have had the effect of re-defining the boundary between the public and private spheres. This is due, in part, to the diminished role of the “reformed” neo-liberal State as actively interventionist and as an agent of income redistribution. It is also a product, he argues, of popular sector demands for property rights and access to basic urban services (such as electricity and potable water), which were equally important as demands related to salaries and working conditions, having been satisfied among large numbers of the urban poor. As a result, the community organizations of the urban poor have turned their attention to new concerns, such as employment, financial services, and delinquency.26 Whereas employment, financial services and other of these issues have traditionally been concerns of the private sphere, community-based CSOs have brought them squarely into the public sphere. Recent surveys of public opinion in Lima thus consistently list “employment” as the number one issue of concern.

When one considers the vast “civil society of the poor,” then, it is impossible to claim that Peru’s civil society has been demobilized during the 1990s. As Aldo Panfichi and Walter Twanama point out in their study of two poor Lima neighborhoods, vast networks of friends, families and neighbors amount to new types of social organizations that play vital roles in the day-to-day struggle for survival.27 Peruvian civil society in the 1990s is highly active, but in efforts that are decentralized and thus, less visible to the outside observer than traditional civil society with its peak organizations, mass demonstrations, etc.

It is commonly asserted, furthermore, that the vast “civil society of the poor” of the 1990s is manipulated by President Fujimori for his own electoral purposes. The growing dependence on the State for resources of many community-based CSOs, particularly the so-called survival groups that participate in widespread feeding programs has, indeed, vastly limited the autonomy of these organizations.

Nonetheless, numerous analysts have pointed out that it is incorrect to view Peru’s community-based CSOs as being merely dependent on the government and, therefore, manipulated by Fujimori for electoral and other purposes. Tanaka points to the bare majority gained in the October 1993 referendum on the new constitution, and to the lack of success by official

26 Tanaka, pp. 422-27.
candidates in the 1995 and 1998 municipal elections, as proof that Fujimori was unable to count on the consistent political support of the poor. Rather he was obligated to earn that support, “within a relationship characterized by give-and-take, not by loyalty.”

The extraordinary increase in government spending prior to the 1995 elections was the most egregious example of the use of fiscal policy for political purposes. The orchestrated invasions of private property in Villa El Salvador and elsewhere during January and February 2000 and the subsequent creation of a Program for Family Lots (Profam) within the Ministry of Transportation, in which the poor were promised title to lots in order to build homes on State-owned properties, was, similarly, an openly political use of State resources. One of the beneficiaries of Profam told a reporter from La República that “Everyone believes that the poor are unaware that this is part of a campaign to gain votes, but just like the politicians have interests, the poor likewise have interests, and we must take advantage of such opportunities.”

President Fujimori’s March 2000 announcement of increases in the minimum wage, monthly payments to pensioners, and easier access to the government health-care system Essaulud, were greeted in the tabloid press by headlines “Fuji Suelta la Plata.” These examples demonstrate receipt of government assistance by the poor does not necessarily translate into making them Fujimori loyalists. Rather, the government must continually earn their loyalty. Fujimori, unlike Alan García, enjoys a fiscal situation that gives him the flexibility to pursue such a “neo-populist” course.

Similarly, Francisco Sagasti argues that the dependence of community-based CSOs on government resources has the effect of fostering, rather than loyalty to Fujimori, resentment and humiliation at being required to produce such public “expressions of loyalty” as baking a cake on the president’s birthday or painting political slogans. Such resentment is just as likely to produce expressions of anger at the government as loyalty and political support. This results in the community-based CSOs possession of an unstable and uncertain political role.

Degregori, Coronel and del Pino analyze the support for Fujimori in Ayacucho as a product of the belief of local leaders that they are included within a new political system that is more representative than in the past. “Fujimorismo” in Ayacucho is analyzed as a “participatory channel for those sectors of the population that previously had been marginalized from politics or represented by defeated alternatives, such as the United Left or velasquismo.”

Peru’s civil society of the poor, then, developed what was, in effect, a mutually beneficial relationship with the Fujimori government during the 1990s. The relationship was characterized, rather than by loyalty or manipulation, by a pragmatic attitude of “you scratch my back, and I’ll scratch yours.”

28 Tanaka, ibid., pp. 428.
30 La República, 23 de febrero del 2000.
31 Interview with Francisco Sagasti, January 27, 2000. These ideas are also developed, in part, in Sagasti, et. al., pp. 64-66.
Can the community-based CSOs be considered to be supporters of liberal democracy? The unfortunate answer seems to be “no.” Two recent studies coincide in their public opinion findings that while Peruvians generally favor democracy over other systems of government, this is less the case among the lower socio-economic groups that make up the community-based CSOs. Sinesio López finds a significant correlation between higher levels of income and higher levels of support for a combination of six indicators of democracy: periodic elections, freedom of expression, government fulfillment of the will of the majority, the necessity of a functioning Congress, an opposition to the government, and a political party system. Similarly, the data developed by Julio Carrión, et. al. indicate that “those who show less preference for democracy...live in economically precarious situations,...[while p]eople who …have a better socio-economic situation…are less tolerant of authoritarianism...” Among the other conclusions of this study is that the level of community involvement is much higher among lower socio-economic groups than among upper and middle sectors, but that this involvement is generally with the goal of obtaining goods and services that are not in the reach of the poor in the marketplace, and that this community involvement has little effect on their commitment to democracy.

C. The Growth of Civic-Oriented NGOs

As mentioned earlier, Peruvian NGOs have traditionally been devoted to research and economic development, and their relation to civil society has been limited to leadership training. A small but growing number of Peru’s sizable NGO community has begun to undertake active civic roles as watch-dogs over the public sector and in the mobilization of citizens for a variety of democratic objectives. This section will consider some of the more significant of these civic NGOs and their role as forces for democracy in Peru during the 1990s.

The National Human Rights Coordinator is one of the earliest and, perhaps, the most significant of these civic-oriented NGOs. Founded in 1985, the Coordinator played a vital role in the development of Peru’s vibrant community of human rights NGOs during the subsequent decade of violent internal warfare, and by 2000, it had over 60 NGOs under its umbrella. During the violence, the Coordinator acted as the principal voice for this growing community of NGOs that monitored human rights violations by the government as well as its opponents, reported its findings to the Peruvian and foreign governments, educated the public in Peru and abroad on the importance of human rights and on the Peruvian reality, provided humanitarian assistance to the victims of violence, and networked with the growing international human rights community. The National Human Rights Coordinator and its member organizations can be given credit for having developed a widespread civic consciousness in Peru with respect to human rights, one of the important components of liberal democracy.

33 Sinesio López, Sociedad Civil en el Perú, p. 171.
34 Julio Carrión, Martín Tanaka and Patricia Zárate Democratic Participation in Peru, p. 123.
35 Ibid., pp. 121, 125.
The Human Rights Coordinator became less vocal with the diminishing level of violence in the late 1990s. On March 3, 2000, however, it made a public expression of its “deep concern and vigorous condemnation of the current electoral process” which, it proclaimed, “denies Peruvians of their fundamental human right to freely elect their political representatives,” as guaranteed under article 21 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.36

Another group of civic-oriented NGOs that had a significant impact during the 1990s was concerned with women’s rights. By the end of the decade, this growing civic movement had also formed an umbrella organization, the National Coordinator of Peruvian Women’s Organizations. One of the oldest and most influential organizations promoting women’s rights was the Movimiento Manuela Ramos.

The two principal items on the agenda for Peru’s woman’s movement during the 1990s were the promotion of women into public office and legislation and civic education on family violence. Both areas witnessed considerable progress during the decade. New electoral laws were passed that required at least 25 percent of all party lists for Congress and for municipal positions to be held by women, and as a result, women are today significantly more active in politics in Peru than they were only a decade ago. The campaign against family violence has, perhaps most importantly, brought this widespread problem out of obscurity and into the public arena. A June 1997 law, furthermore, significantly strengthened the ability to prosecute cases of family violence. The October 1996 creation of the Ministry of the Promotion of Women and Human Development (Promudeh) is another sign of the growing role of women in the Peruvian political arena.

Agenda: Peru and the Democratic Forum (Foro Democrático) are two civic-oriented NGOs that, by comparison, were unable to have a major political impact during the 1990s. Agenda: Peru was initiated in 1992 as the principal program of the National/International Forum Civic Association for the purposes of promoting development and democratic governance, dialogue and consensus on key subjects of concern to civil society, and civic education. Towards these goals, Agenda: Peru conducted a large number of seminars and workshops, in-depth interviews, focus groups and public opinion surveys throughout Peru, and thus accumulated a vast data bank on Peruvian social and political realities. Agenda: Peru was never able to interest the Fujimori government in participating in dialogue, however, and by the end of the decade, it was preparing to close its doors.

The Democratic Forum Civic Association was also born in the aftermath of the April 1992 coup d’état, with a more clearly political agenda to counter the growing authoritarianism of the Fujimori government. Its principal activity during the 1990s was a campaign -- waged in the wake of the Congressional passage of the “authentic interpretation” law in August 1996 that opened the door for Fujimori to run for a third term of office in 2000 -- to hold a national referendum in which citizens would be able to express their opinion on the re-election issue. The Democratic Forum successfully mobilized thousands of citizens, many of them university students.

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students, to collect more than the 1.25 million signatures (10 percent of the registered voters) required by law in order to hold a national referendum. However, a series of legal maneuvers by the Fujimori-controlled Congress, including its passage of a law stipulating that holding a referendum also requires Congressional approval, culminated in August 1998, when the effort to hold a referendum was, in effect, killed. The Forum was devastated by this blow, but in 1999, it resurfaced to sponsor a campaign to train poll-watchers for the 2000 general elections. At a March 8 press conference the Democratic Forum announced that, in light of the growing number of violations of election laws in the ongoing general election campaign amounted to the violation of the citizens’ right to participate in free and fair elections, it would request that the National Electoral Jury declare the electoral process to be null and void.37

The Transparency Civic Association (Transparencia) was founded in 1994 “with the goal of constructing a civic movement for democracy.” Its principal activities concern elections, specifically, civic education in the functioning of the electoral system and the rights of the electorate, and the observation of all aspects of the electoral process. Its observation teams for the general elections in 1995 and 2000 and for municipal elections in 1995 and 1998 consisted of a total of over 27,000 volunteers.

Transparency’s electoral observation prior to the controversial 2000 general elections had a particularly important political impact. Transparency assumed a leading role in the investigation and publicizing of problems in the campaign, including its belief that President Fujimori’s candidacy is unconstitutional, that the official electoral registry was obsolete (thus leaving open the possibility of fraud on election day), and that the electoral playing field is not level, with President-candidate Fujimori having unfair advantage, particularly in his coverage in the mass media and his access to State resources.

The growth of civic-oriented NGOs during the 1990s has been an important development within Peruvian civil society, and they have played an important watch-dog role in the authoritarian context presented by fujimorismo. Perhaps their most important role, in the absence of an effective system of political parties, was in the mobilization of citizens on behalf of democratic values that was undertaken by Transparency and the Democratic Forum. A weakness shared by all these organizations, and by Peruvian NGOs in general, was their high degree of dependency on foreign sources of financing. Larry Diamond points out that this carries at least two dangers: first, international donors carry their own agendas that are often distinct from their beneficiaries, and secondly, donor budgets rise and fall with the changing priorities in the donor countries.38

V. Conclusions

In the introduction of this paper, we stated our objective to be to test the affirmation that the loss of the vital political role that civil society had enjoyed between 1975 and 1985 is an important

aspect of the weakening of democracy in Peru during the 1990s. While it seemed to be a relatively uncomplicated objective, in fact, the survey of the status of civil society in the 1990s presented above offers no simple overall conclusion. Rather, the best we can do is to draw a number of limited conclusions.

First of all, civil society remains a vital part of Peruvian society, particularly among the poor. Its character has changed dramatically, however, from the traditional, political party-affiliated civil society of the 1970s and 1980s. The most significant portion of Peruvian civil society at the turn of the century was made up of community-based CSOs dedicated to activities that assisted between a third and a half of Peru’s population to survive amidst a state of wretched poverty. Clubes de madres, comités de vaso de leche and similar organizations have become somewhat of a permanent part of a Peruvian landscape of persistent poverty. A second new aspect of Peruvian civil society consisted of a small-but-growing number of civic-oriented NGOs.

A simple characterization of the political role of community-based CSOs is elusive. In general this “civil society of the poor” cannot be characterized as a force in support of liberal democracy. While recent studies show that Peru’s poor are generally more tolerant of authoritarianism than those in higher social strata, by no means do the poor constitute a loyal following for President Fujimori. Rather, a kind of symbiotic relationship developed between Fujimori and the civil society of the poor, in which each used the other in a pragmatic, and at times desperate, effort to attain their own particular needs.

The new civic-oriented NGOs played a much more straightforward role in support of democratic values and in opposition to the authoritarianism of the Fujimori government. They were joined in this role by the Church and the remnants of other traditional CSOs. Campesino, labor, and student organizations in the 1990s were but a shadow of the powerful organizations of two decades ago however. Taken together, these democratic elements of Peru’s civil society were able to make their voices heard during the Fujimori decade, but they proved unable to undertake effective actions to counter the development of an increasingly entrenched dictatorship. Civil society, by itself, lacks the capacity to negotiate with the government. This role, so vital to a democratic system, must be played by political parties.

Larry Diamond’s principal conclusion in his examination of the role of civil society in Developing Democracy is very relevant to the Peruvian case: “the single most important and urgent factor in the consolidation of democracy is not civil society but political institutionalization...Civil society can, and typically must, play a central role in building and consolidating democracy...[but] strong parties and effective state institutions are [most] vital.”39 Another vital role played by Peru’s now-virtually defunct system of political parties during the best part of three decades was to link Peru’s upper and lower social strata into a common democratic political project.40 A revitalized political party system is thus an essential component of the integration of liberal democratic principles into Peru’s “civil society of the poor.”

39 Ibid., pp. 259-60.
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